"I think I have grown up a lot and realized that I need to be a lot healthier because my body needs the good stuff. I am more open to trying new things, my level of confidence grew and I grew as a leader. This summer I think will change the rest of my life for the better."  

-Logan

"I have accomplished gaining more self-respect. "Food, What?!" is such a great place that makes everyone feel comfortable...I have changed by being focused and making sure I show up on time. That wouldn't happen before "Food, What?!"  

-Brandon
"I have changed a lot since I started working on an organic farm. I haven’t eaten as much bad food like burgers and sodas, or as much candy. Now I like to eat more fruits and vegetables cause its very good and healthy. I try to tell people that organic food is the best and it is what they should eat.” - Oscar

Presentations:

- Youth led a workshop at EcoFarm Conference on “How to Effectively Host Youth on Your Farm”
- Youth led a nutrition and label reading workshop on popular drinks at the Spring Strawberry Blast event
- Youth attended the Next Generation Gathering to design a national youth-led food justice alliance
- Hosted six school group visits introducing students to youth empowerment through food, farming, and health
- Worked with Pajaro Valley High School to design and implement their school gardening program
- Presented to students at the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems on how to successfully engage youth in sustainable agriculture projects
School Based Programs (Youth Empowerment Classroom Workshop Series)

*Food for Thought Lesson Series Description:*

This program brings “Food, What?!?” into the high school classroom. We open with an icebreaker to build energy and engagement—facilitate the theme-based workshop—then close with a healthy, organic, food tasting and rating. The workshops are as follows:

Session 1: “What is Youth Empowerment?” Relationship building and buy-in.

Session 2: “Communication and Public Speaking” in which students develop confidence and ability in public speaking and communication, and initiate trust and rapport that they can call upon in each of the following lessons

Session 3: “Nike, Hip-Hop and Your Food System” a workshop on media literacy focusing on how the food industry markets their products, on body image and “coolness” issues resulting from advertising tactics, and issues around age, class and race in targeted marketing

Session 4: “Financial Literacy—Show Me the Money” in which students learn about budget creation and balancing their budgets, the risks of debt, and strategies for prioritizing their spending.

Session 5: “Fast Food Jeopardy” in which students participate in a game about fast food investigating sanitation, health, nutrition, and money

Session 6: “Nutrition, Label Reading, and Youth Dollar Power” in which students learn to read food labels by measuring and comparing the actual amounts of sugar and fat in various, common food items and then discuss the power of youth through their decision-making around purchases

Doron taught a youth empowerment and health curriculum in 2 alternative education public high schools (STAR Community School and Natural Bridges H.S.--Green Careers Center) for the month of January serving 36 students
The Spring Internship at FoodWhat served 28 students who each came once a week for 15 weeks. In 2007 we had 5 students in the Spring—in 2008 we received 18 applications, so we created 18 spots for internships—this year, with only a fraction of the outreach, over 100 students applied for 28 positions. There is a clear need for this type of programming in our community.

- Each week we did an opening icebreaker, one hour of farm work, one hour youth empowerment and skill building workshop, one hour of cooking, and closed with quiet journaling time.
- Having successfully completed the Spring Internship, students earned a $175 stipend, 1-2 school credits, and the opportunity to apply for the Summer Job Training Program.
- The number one bit of feedback from the youth about the Spring Internship is that cooking and eating is their favorite activity and offered them a big opportunity to grow and change (through their eating habits).

“I understand the importance of being healthy and have the tools to be a leader in my community and help people.” —Mark
SPRING:

FoodWhat and the spring interns hosted our annual Strawberry Blast serving 200 Santa Cruz County students and their teachers introducing them to the farm and healthy food.

“In my lunch time I eat different than what I used to eat.”  

-Franky
This summer FoodWhat employed 19 youth in a paid job-training program for July and August. Three of last year’s graduates worked as Junior Staff. We focused on skills to be able to succeed in a job with a strong emphasis on timeliness and communication. The crew worked four days a week—three days on our farm and nearby Freewheelin’ farm, and one day doing community service at the Homeless Garden Project. Each part of our day included the “Four R’s”—elements of responsibility, relationships, relevance, and rigor. We saw incredible growth in each of our youth with the youth themselves reporting huge personal and professional development at the end of the summer.

“"I feel like I can finally see myself, and change according to how I want to grow as a person. I have accomplished more this summer physically, mentally, and spiritually than I could have ever hoped for.” —Mark

For FoodWhat Youth:
- Cooked daily lunches with our own farm fresh produce
- Engaged in job training, leadership development, and personal growth activities
- Took care of our bodies with weekly yoga
- Started a flower bouquet micro-business
- Exercised daily through the physical activity of farming
- Participated in bike safety training and then biked produce into town
- Built a supportive community of youth and adults working together
- Laughed, had fun, and celebrated success and each other
Summer (ctd):

For Family:
- Youth grew 19 veggie shares (at Freewheelin Farm) to feed their own families and connect the diet changes they embraced at FoodWhat with food prepared in their homes.
- Hosted 3 parent cooking nights with farm grown produce in an effort to reinforce positive gains made by the youth in their eating habits—also included one nutrition workshop about “Eating a Rainbow.”
- Celebrated the accomplishments of each youth in the job training program with an end of the season dinner for family and friends—youth helped lead their guests in making farm fresh pizza in our cob ovens with veggies from the farm, tomato sauce made from our field, and goat cheese the youth made earlier in the day.

“I feel more mature and grown up after this experience. Everyone deserves chances like this. I have learned to grow food properly, harvest, and cook it. It’s a really good thing to know because it saves a lot of cash and it’s the healthy choice. I have more understanding about the world, different points of view, and I am able to step up when no one wants to.” - Josy
For Community:

- Grew, harvested, and distributed 960 pounds of fresh organic veggies from the FoodWhat Farm to low-income families in Beach Flats
- Provided 441 community service hours at the Homeless Garden Project
- Organized a farm fresh salad bar at lunch for 600 mostly low-income summer school students at Gault and Bayview Elementary for 4 weeks (in partnership with Freewheelin' Farm) as well as grew and provided flowers for each lunchroom cafeteria table
- Operated two farmers market stands (in partnership with UCSC Farm) at the summer school sites providing affordable healthy produce to local families and providing job training for FoodWhat youth
Summer (ctd):

For Other Youth:

- Represented Santa Cruz at a national youth empowerment and food justice conference in Maine called Rooted in Community
- Hosted 100 youth from the Bay Area to the farm for a day of farming and youth-led workshops, farm fresh pizza making, and networking

“This summer I have accomplished a lot for myself. I stepped out of my comfort zone and did something that I would normally never do. I got dirty and worked on a farm almost every day of the summer and for me that was big….I feel like I have grown from my experiences and learned from my mistakes...I am a lot more willing and open to try new things now.”

-Taimane
Fall Jobs:

FoodWhat employs 12 youth (graduates of the summer job training program) to run one of our micro-businesses during fall for September and October.

- **Catering Business**: FoodWhat is contracted to create meals with farm fresh produce for different Life Lab workshops for teachers. Youth are responsible for harvest, cooking the meals, and presentation. There are further responsibilities to can and preserve the abundance of tomatoes and peppers from the farm this time of year. Lastly, once a week for 7 weeks, the youth run a peer-to-peer cooking experience at the downtown Teen Center cooking healthy meals for up to 30 youth.

- **Flower Business**: Youth are responsible for weekly flower harvest, field maintenance, bouquet making, delivery arrangements, money handling and recording, and documentation. In addition, youth are tasked with running a direct marketing venture of over 250 sunflowers at the UCSC Harvest Festival this Fall including signage, pricing, money collection, change making, customer service, and documentation.

- **Farm and CSA Management**: These positions focus on building leadership capacity to successfully run and operate a small farming operation and direct market sales of produce. Youth are responsible for all aspects of the farm (weeding, transplanting, irrigation, etc) as well as harvesting for, and management of, our low-income CSA to the residents of Beach Flats.

- **Gault Farm Stand**: Working off the success of the summer pilot, FoodWhat is operating a low-income, fresh, organic produce stand at Gault Elementary once a week for the fall. Youth will be conducting the setup and take down, customer service and produce sales, EBT machine use, and all final accounting and reporting.

- **Event Planning**: There is one additional job of planning and implementing the FoodWhat Fall Harvest Festival serving 225-300 Santa Cruz County students. Planning includes organizing the activities/stations, program creation, material collection, soliciting personnel, creating outreach flyer and distribution, writing a press release, and facilitating the actual event and follow-up evaluation.

“I have learned how to be more confident, how to work hard, how to manage my money, how to have my own garden and grow my own food, how to be a better person, how to do things for the community, how to help others… I have learned so much. I feel like I have actually done something useful with my time and I am really proud of that.” — Amber
**Junior Staff Update:**

**Luis** is running the Gault Farm Stand with one FoodWhat Summer Job Training graduate. Luis will be graduating this year from Loudon Nelson Community School. **Kitty** is employed to work 5 hours per week at Meder Street Farm (a local organic farm). Kitty will also be graduating and is hoping to study sustainable agriculture (possibly at UCSC). **Christy** is working 5 hours each week in the kitchen of Companion Bakers, a locally owned Santa Cruz company, doing prep for their Friday bread bake. Christy, the youngest of the group, is now successfully attending Natural Bridges H.S. where she is active in the garden of the Green Careers Center.

“What I have accomplished this summer is that I found myself. I have become a better person. I think the most important things I have learned are leadership skills, how to run my own farm, and more about myself. I have grown in many ways– physically, mentally. I am proud of the person I have become. I feel like I have done so much for myself and others. I have grown to be one smart, independent lady!”

-Christy
“I have accomplished leadership skills, cooking, and harvesting skills. I have learned to open up to people I’ve just met. I have accomplished maturity and growth. I have learned to work hard and be serious when needed or asked to. I’ve learned to talk in front of an entire group without getting nervous. I am more focused on eating and staying healthy.”   -Jakob

A sincere thank you to all the partners, allies, supporters, and believers in “Food, What?!?” and the power of youth.  
(Life Lab 2009)