

The Sweet Potato Project II

Cultivating Youth Leadership, Wellness & Economic Empowerment

A Community Defined Evidence Practice (CDEP) in West Fresno

Program Purpose

The Sweet Potato Project serves African American youth (ages 12–15) in West Fresno through:

- Agricultural entrepreneurship
- Mental health education
- Leadership development
- Cultural empowerment

Goal: Prevent school dropout, substance use, and disengagement by building resilience and economic skills.



Community Context

- Median income: **\$34,147**
- High poverty & food apartheid
- Legacy of redlining



Program Model & Methods

36-week curriculum integrating:

- ✓ **Mental health awareness**
- ✓ **Coping & resilience skills**
- ✓ **Farming instruction**
- ✓ **Business planning**
- ✓ **Public speaking**

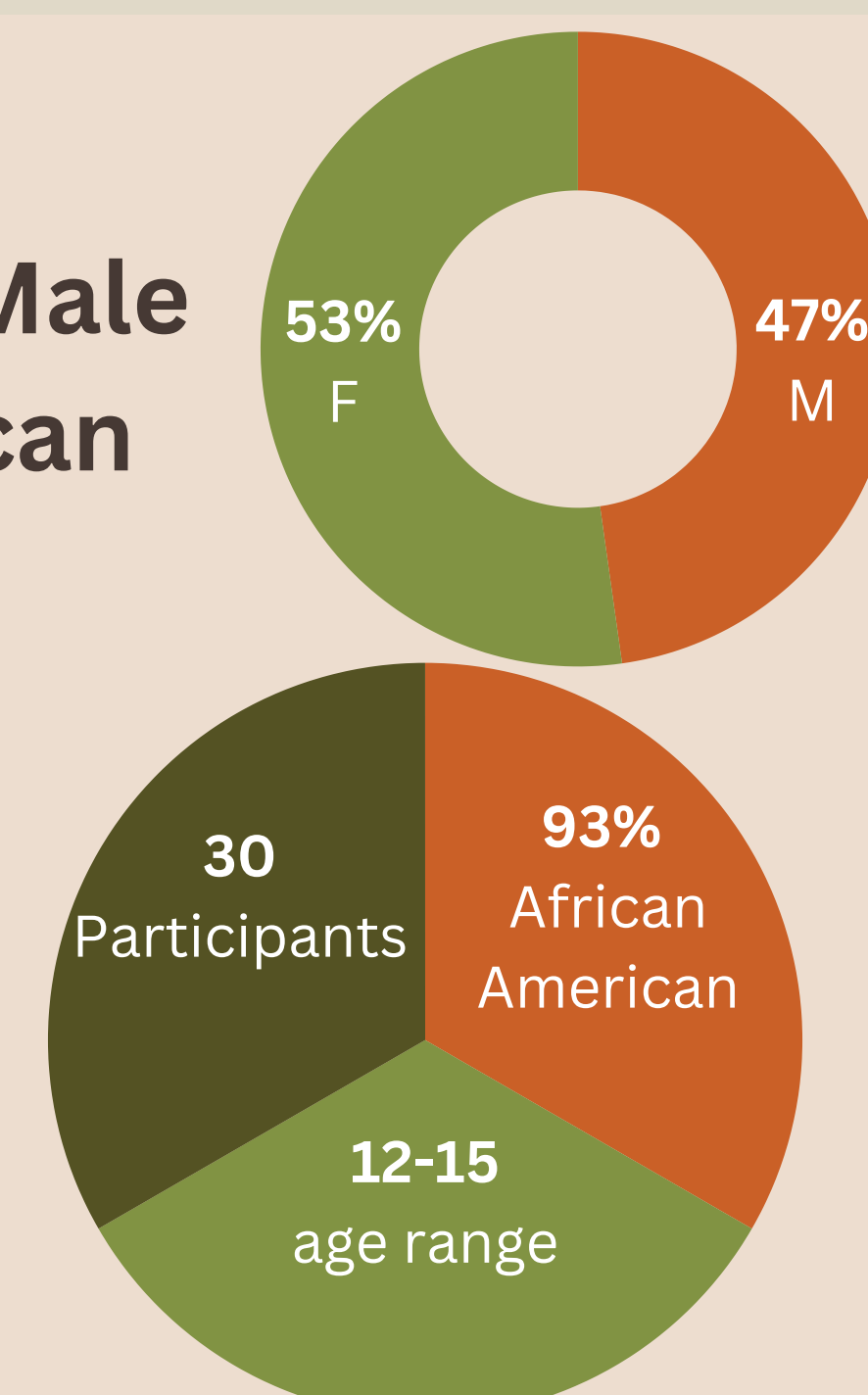


Cultural Significance of Farming

- Black farming legacy
- Land-based learning
- Economic self-determination
- Cultural pride

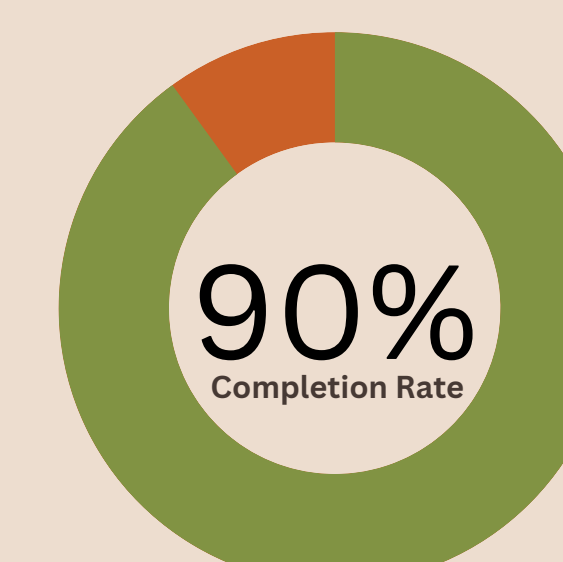
Participants

- **Total 30 youth**
- **53% Female / 47% Male**
- **93% African American**
- **12-15 age range**



Mixed Methods Evaluation

- GPA tracking & attendance records
- Community driven focus
- Parent interviews
- Staff observations
- Document review



Evaluation Period
January 2023- December 2025

Mental Health & Wellness

Safe spaces, peer support & emotional growth

Outcomes

Parents reported:
“My son was shy, now he talks to anyone.”

- Improvements in:
- Confidence
- Leadership
- Communication
- Peer support



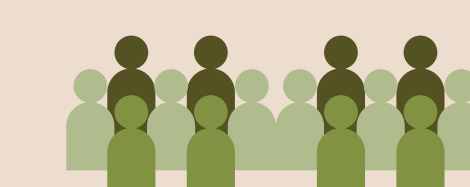
Program Challenges & Limitations

Challenges:

- No clinical mental health staff
- Limited formal assessments
- Summer activity gap
- Funding uncertainty

Sustainability, Scale & Systems

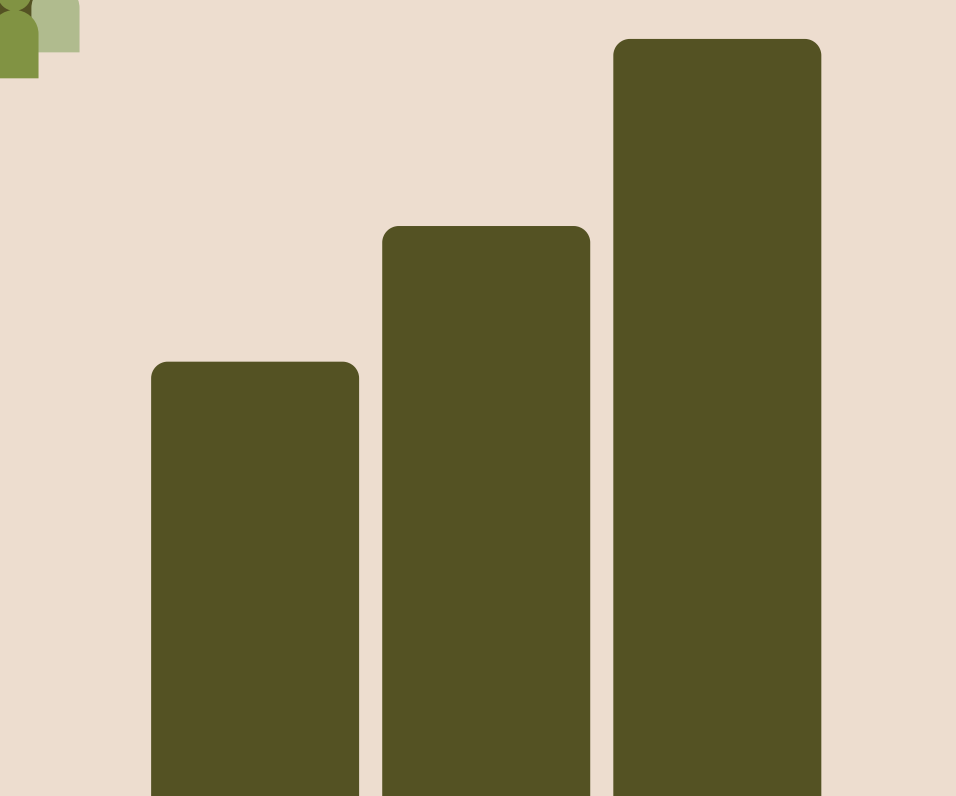
Sustainability



- District Partnerships
- Braided funding
- Staff retention

Scalability

- Replicable curriculum
- Cost modeling



Systems Transformation

- Coalition building
- Policy engagement
- Data sovereignty



Next Steps

1. Strengthen data systems
2. Integrate licensed clinicians
3. Launch alumni tracking
4. Expand year-round programs
5. Secure district partnerships

