ABSTRACT

THESIS:  The Effect of Vermicomposting Knowledge and Visual Cues on Fruit Consumption in the Middle School Lunch Room

STUDENT:  Hannah Killion

DEGREE:  Master of Science

COLLEGE:  College of Health

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Adolescents do not consume the recommended daily amount of whole fruit. As part of the effort to improve the dietary choices of adolescents, traditional nutrition education alone has not been successful. School cafeterias are a strategic place to focus efforts to promote positive behavior change at the site of students’ food selection and consumption. Garden-based sustainability programs correlate with the state-mandated science standards taught in the middle school classroom and have been effective at increasing fruit consumption in children. This study measured the effect of a vermicomposting model on whole fruit consumption in the middle school lunch room. Students were introduced to the concept of vermicomposting in the classroom through a lesson plan. Students were invited to participate in the vermicomposting process by contributing their fruit scraps to a worm bin that was placed in the school cafeteria for the duration of the study. A significant increase in familiarity with the topic of vermicomposting was observed after implementation of the lesson plan. Compared to baseline, the control school experienced an overall increase in fully consumed and partially consumed fruit, while the intervention school experienced a simultaneous decrease in consumption. No significant changes in fruit selection were observed.