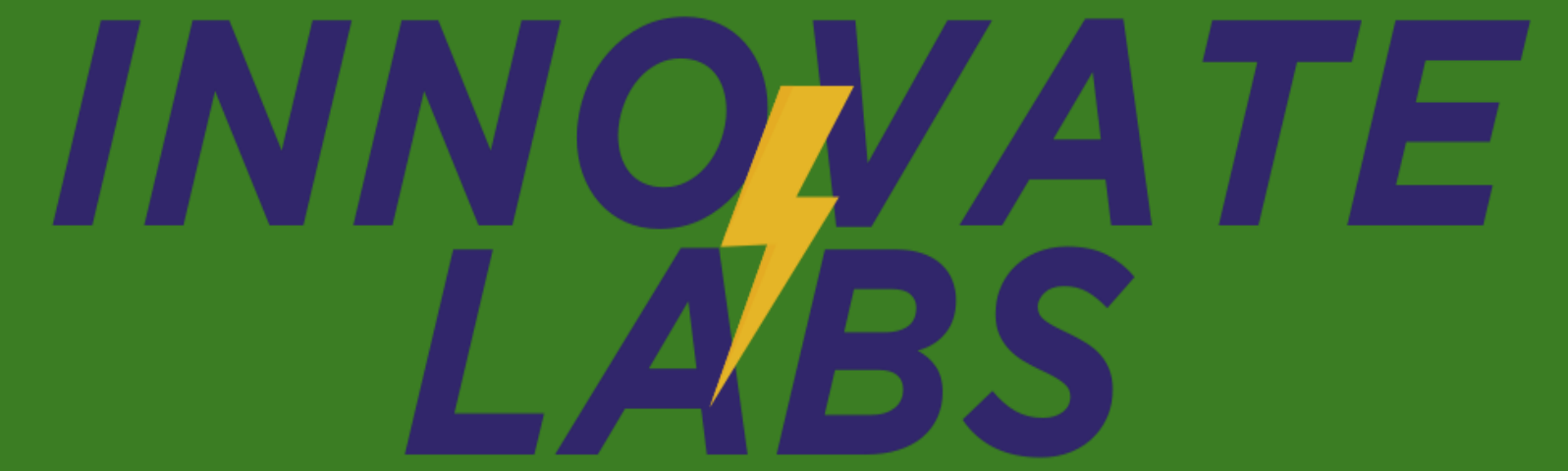




# Seeds2Sustain



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## Project Summary

In Fall 2024, the original Seeds2Sustain program was developed. The goal of the program was to introduce students to the tools necessary to grow their own food and fight personal food insecurity. The program was designed to teach students about food insecurity and how to combat it on a personal level. College students struggle from food insecurity due to a variety of factors. Most college students have to focus on buying what is cheap and easy to make instead of what is healthy. Studies done at UConn show that around 40% of students at the Storrs campus and as much as 50% of students at the regional campuses suffer from food insecurity. The program was designed to create a foundational understanding of food insecurity and different factors that can contribute to it. Our goal was to run the program again with a few key changes to enhance the experience and learning.

**Students learned about food insecurity, nutrition, the evolution of food production, hydroponics, the business of hydroponics, modern hydroponics, hydroponic technologies, and cooking.**

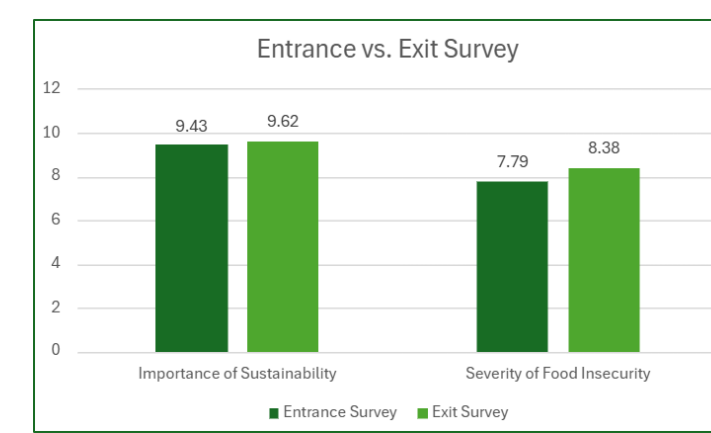
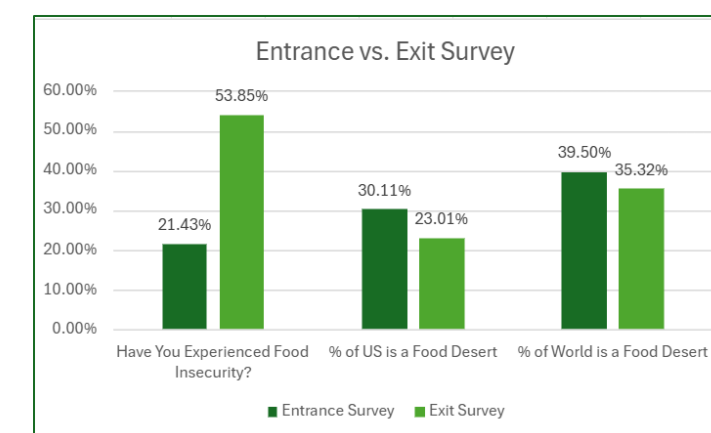
Throughout the program, students grew plants in LetPot hydroponic systems. Each system contained 10 spots for growing plants. Students had the option to grow a variety of lettuces, other leafy greens, herbs, cherry tomatoes, and jalapenos.

## Key Changes

1. The “History of Food Production” and “Modern-Day Food Production” Sessions were condensed into one session.
2. We added a “Hydroponic Technologies” session to teach students about how to take care of their systems in a more technical way.
3. We changed the time of the program to Wednesday nights.
4. We added more interactive activities to each week’s session.
5. We offered a greater number of vegetables and herbs for students to grow.



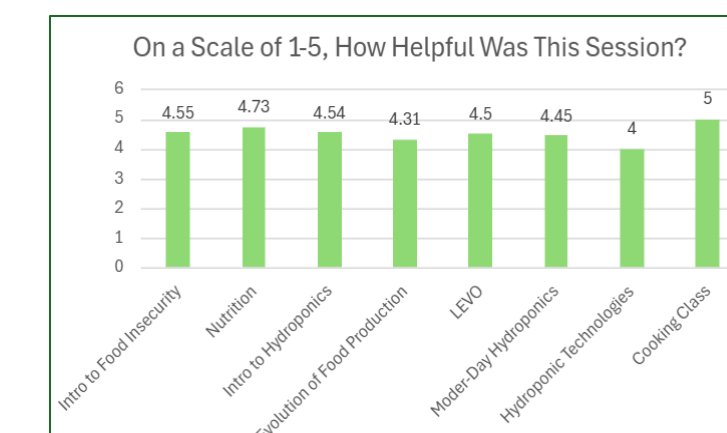
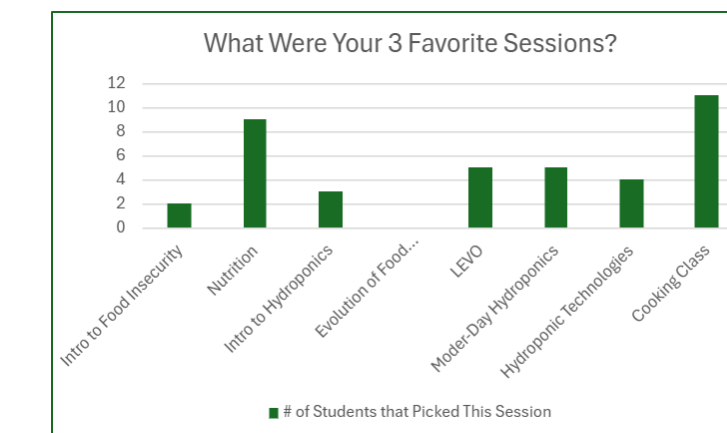
## Pre/Post Survey



**Key Takeaways:**

1. On Average, the rating of importance increased for every category, but the importance was very high from the beginning.
2. The number of students who believe they have experienced food insecurity increased by 30%.
3. The actual food insecurity in the US is between 13 and 20%. The actual food insecurity in the World is between 25 and 33%. The numbers got closer to the actual values. For the food insecurity in the US, most students actually said 13-20%. There were 2 outliers that raised the values.

## Results



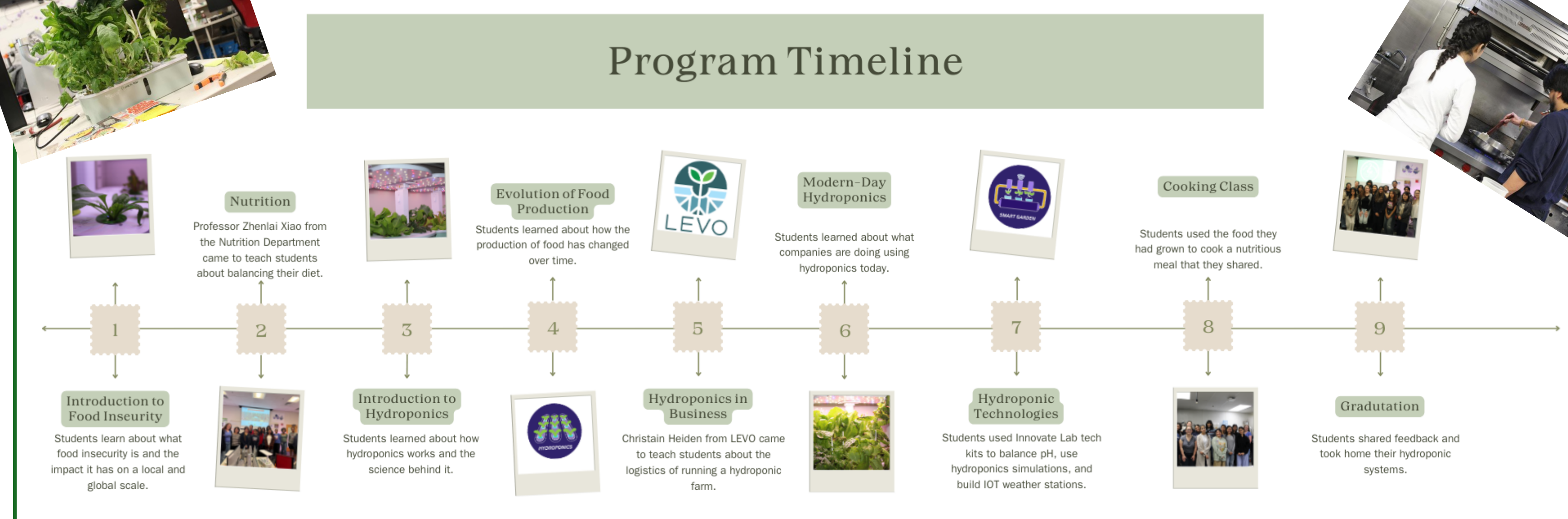
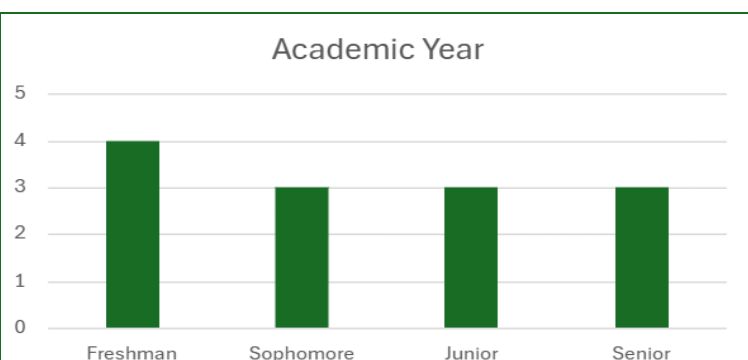
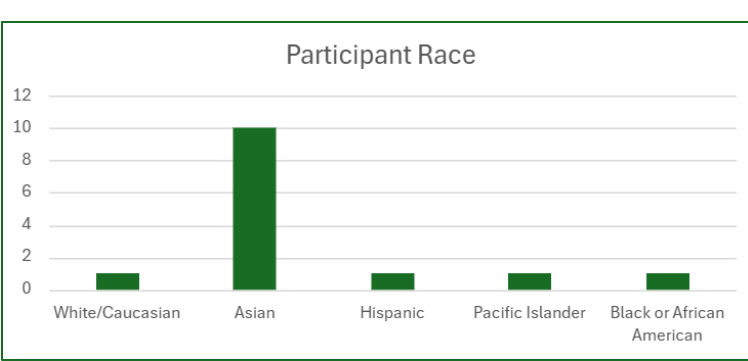
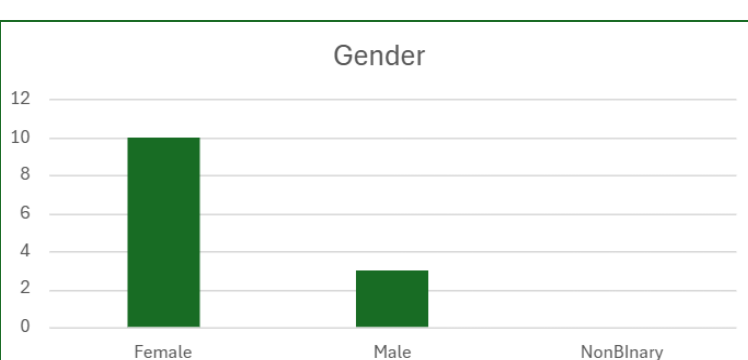
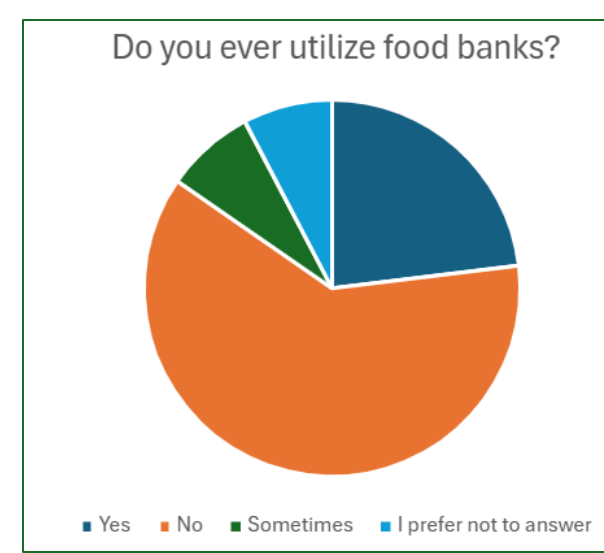
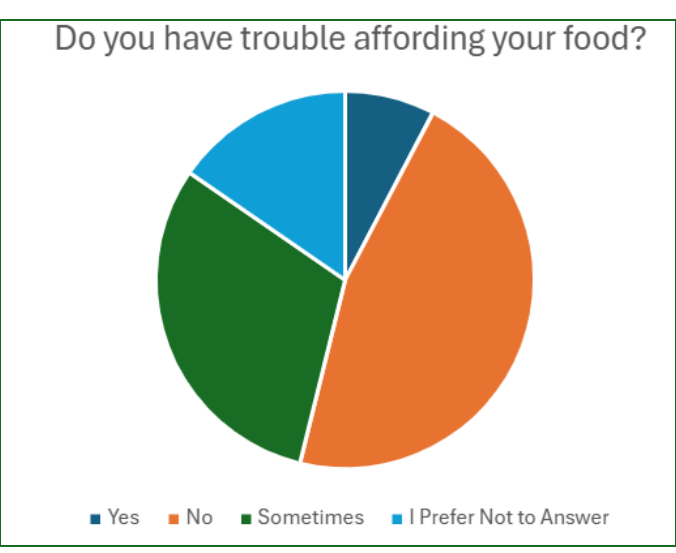
**100% of students said they would do the program again. Even amongst the sessions they like the least, students reported learning a lot. 4 students said they would have liked even more session per week and more engagement.**

## Cohort Selection and Demographics

We wanted to concentrate on a single, dedicated group of students that would be part of our nine-week program. We had an application and review process. We selected 13 students that would be a part of the program from our applicants. Some things that we looked for include:

- o Enthusiasm for learning about sustainability
- o Interest in hydroponics and how it works
- o The intention to use this class to learn how to grow their own food in the future.

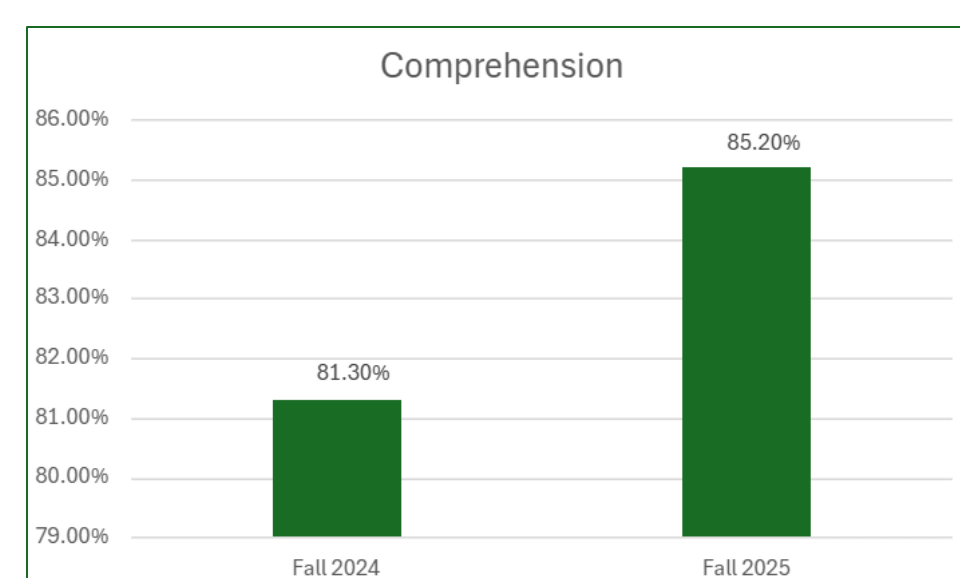
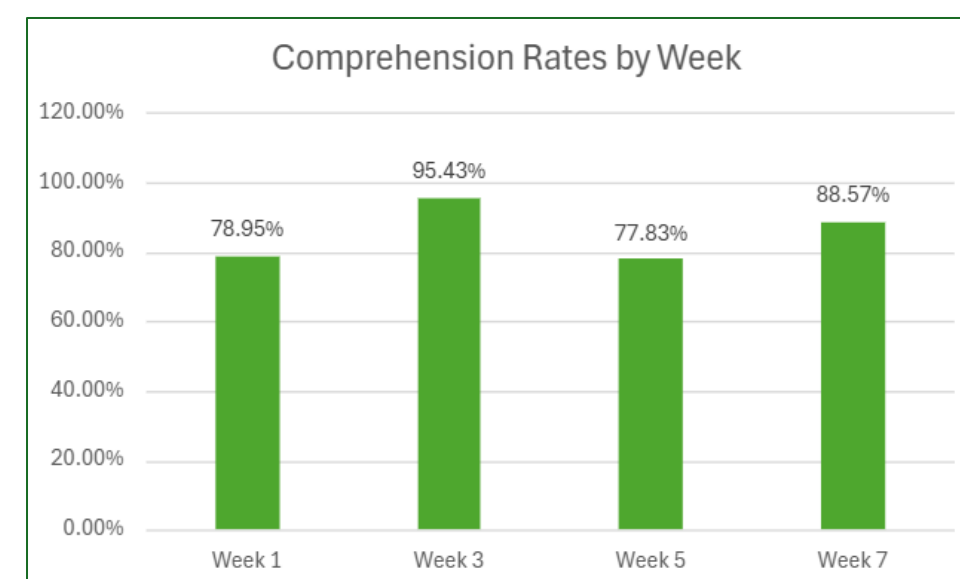
\*Students who self-identified as experiencing food insecurity were given priority acceptance into the program



## Why did you want to join Seeds2Sustain?

- “I wanted to join this group because I am a big fan of hydroponic vegetables being available in farmers’ markets near my hometown, which has led me to take more of an interest in it.”
- “Seeds2Sustain is a great opportunity to learn more about food insecurity and sustainable farming, especially if I want to pursue a career in youth outreach and education in urban areas and historically disadvantaged communities.”
- “I want to bridge the gap between food production and my plate. Having the resources to grow my own food and learn would deepen my appreciation of the environment and is ultimately “cleaner” for the environment than the current model of how we get our food.”
- “This is the first time I’ve eaten a really healthy diet because of the dining halls so I want to see if this is a way for me to learn and eventually show my brothers to grow food.”
- “I want to learn about how to make small sustainable gardens so that after I graduate I can implement that in my future apartment.”
- “Through participating in Seeds2Sustain, I hope to educate myself in using hydroponics and further my knowledge of food production.”

## Comprehension



Every 2 Weeks, the students take a short survey about the content they have learned. The comprehension rates for each survey and each program were compared.

**Key Takeaways:**

1. The changes made are increasing comprehension for the students overall.
2. Week 2 and 3 are contain very memorable content for the students.

## What did you think of the program?

- “I believe it was extremely valuable because I connected with people and learned a lot of material I would not find in a classroom necessarily.”
- “I learned a lot about sustainability, healthy eating habits, growing plants, and what food insecurity is. These topics are important and interesting and I am glad to have learned them.”
- “It helped me find more of a community of people who were passionate about learning how to take care of plants. It also helped me look forward to a change in my schedule, because it was something fun to do after a stressful day at school.”
- “I got to meet so many people and have my questions answered in such an accepting space without judgement.”
- “I loved it because I got to learn about the usefulness of hydroponics and how it can be used in the community to address community issues.”
- “I got to meet some interesting people and really enjoyed the food we cooked.”

## Next Steps

We want to continue improving the program. We would like to incorporate the feedback to offer more information about setting up systems at home with cheap materials. We also would like to expand the program to the satellite campuses of Stamford and Hartford.

**A special thank you to all our partners/guest speakers who made this possible including: LEVO International, Christian Heiden, Alia Te, Max Alphonse, UConn Dining Services, Robert Landolphi, Kyle Davis, UConn Nutrition, Dr. Zhenlei Xiao, Kayla Rushforth, and the UConn Office of Sustainability.**

