

School garden projects need funding to grow

By Janet Begley

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INDIAN RIVER COUNTY—A gardening project at elementary and middle schools in Indian River County may be discontinued if organizers can't raise money for it and find additional volunteers.

More than 80 square-foot gardens in 13 schools were sponsored by the Pelican Island Audubon Society through a \$9,980 grant from Toyota's TogetherGreen program about 18 months ago. Since that time, vegetable gardens managed by teachers, students and volunteers have prospered throughout the schools, with vegetables making their way to students' homes and school kitchens.

But the grant money has

been exhausted and Audubon volunteer Graham Cox said about \$5,000 is needed to maintain the gardens already in place, and \$15,000 to expand it into other schools that would like to join the project.

"We need this to continue buying the supplies," said Cox, who estimates the cost for each square-foot garden is about \$100. "We were able to stretch the initial 12-month grant for 18 months, through to last December, but we are

now running on empty."

Cox said Audubon volunteer Peter Sutherland has coordinated the program for the past year, moving from school to school offering gardening advice and helping tend the gardens. But Sutherland needs to spend more time working on his own business in real estate, and Cox is looking for someone who is willing to take on the project for a small stipend.

"If we were able to raise about \$15,000 for the

project, it would be wonderful," Cox said. "We've been relying on the good graces of Peter Sutherland and his son, Adam, to provide volunteer services, but he cannot keep doing this forever."

The group has put together a 12-minute video presentation outlining the square-foot gardening project that is posted on the Pelican Island Audubon Society's website. In the video, students and their teachers discuss the project and show how family diets, good nutrition and good health are tied to the environment.

Liza Ostrower, a third-grade teacher at the Rosewood Magnet School, and her class participated in the garden project last year and found it to be a positive experience.

HOW TO HELP

- The Square-Foot Garden project needs help with money, materials and volunteers from the community, schools and PTAs to continue the project this year.
- The video about the project can be viewed on the Audubon Society website at www.pelicanislandaudubon.org.
- To volunteer or make a donation, contact Graham Cox at glcox@audubon.org or 772-388-5394.