

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A New Type of Garden Grows This Spring – A Virtual Garden that Helps Kids Learn About Nutrition and Gardening as a Way to Connect with Real Gardens and Healthier Eating Choices

MILWAUKEE, WI, Apr. 21, 2010 – KidsCom.com's Idea Seeker virtual world, where kids explore a broad range of learning fun, is pleased to announce the opening of the Idea Seekers Garden game, a virtual play experience designed to promote a cleaner, greener planet and healthier kids. The Idea Seekers Garden game seeks to teach children about the value of growing their own, locally-produced food in home, school or community gardens, allowing them to make informed choices about their diet while learning healthy, easy recipes to make at home.

"We are excited about the new opportunities to use virtual gardening as a way to connect kids to real gardens, like the Michigan 4-H Children's Gardens and school gardens and to connect them directly to their food" says Dr. Norm Lownds, Curator of the 4-H Children's Gardens. "This unique combination of virtual and real experiences will empower kids to ask questions and to direct their own learning. We are convinced that the combination of virtual gardens, real gardens, experts, kids, teachers and parents can be a model for integrating informal and formal learning both inside and outside the classroom. It is 21st century education!"

"We're trying to use the computer to get kids off of the computer and give them a learning experience that can help bring kids, moms, dads, grandmas and grandpas together," explains Jori Clarke, CEO of Circle 1 Network, publisher of www.KidsCom.com. "With many adults familiar with gardening and cooking and many kids familiar with social media and virtual worlds, we put those different areas of expertise together to create a fun game the whole family can enjoy while creating new eating and fitness behaviors in the household."

KidsCom.com's Idea Seekers Garden uses virtual world game play to tie in with school and community garden programs that teach about growing plants, plant issues, nutrition and food preparation. Using kid approved recipes from the USDA recipe database and other public sources, kids will be able to use the virtual produce from their garden to make healthy virtual meals for their avatar. This will help to educate and excite them about making healthy meals in their real kitchens at home. Kids are able to place their healthy virtual meals into their virtual houses and invite friends over to sample them. Their avatars can then do a fun "Snap Dance" if they eat the healthy meal. Kids can also visit their friends' gardens to help them solve different problems with their plants, such as aphids, drought, disease, and other pests and gardening issues.

The virtual garden is part of a larger program Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) is developing for schools that want to incorporate nutrition and gardening into their lesson plans. The "MyGarden" lessons include ready-to-use lessons that meet Michigan educational standards and the USDA dietary guidelines.

"The virtual gardening experience at KidsCom.com provides an innovative educational opportunity for youth to learn about gardening and nutrition and rounds out our MyGarden program here in Michigan," says Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) associate program leader Becky Henne.

About KidsCom.com

KidsCom.com's Idea Seeker Universe is populated with virtual worlds where simulation experiences, video and mini-game learning helps build awareness and interest in real world social issues, solutions, activities, products and services. Known for its unique play with virtual world/real world connections where players in the online game experience are sent to real world

experiences, it offers fun learning that is leading innovation in education and providing engaging opportunities designed to make life better for families.

For more information, please visit: www.kidscom.com.

About the Michigan 4-H Children's Gardens of the Michigan State University Horticulture Department

Dedicated in 1993, the Michigan 4-H Children's Gardens was the first interactive outdoor landscape garden for children at a public garden in the United States. It was one of the first children's gardens to directly incorporate learning objectives into the design; it has served as a model for the design of many other children's gardens and has been described as "the most creative half-acre in America". The gardens include over 80 themes, dance chimes, a greenhouse and green roof. It is a place where plants, children and imaginations grow.

For more information, please visit: <http://4hgarden.msu.edu/kidstour>.

About Michigan State University Extension

Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) helps people improve their lives through an educational process that applies knowledge to critical issues, needs and opportunities. *This material was funded in part by USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program by way of the Michigan Department of Human Services and Michigan State University Extension*

For more information, please visit www.msue.msu.edu.

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