

Café Services Wellness Newsletter
Mascenic Regional School District

Farm to School

Overcoming Barriers

John Kenyon, District Manager

Local farms are generally small and do not have resources to distribute products. They often rely on foot traffic and walk in business. Schools on the other hand, don't have the resources to pick up foods and therefore rely on large distribution companies to deliver products which aren't necessarily locally grown.

Café Services is overcoming this barrier by developing relationships with people who understand the value of fresh local produce in schools and assist with the distribution of those products. One person that has been instrumental with this is Hans Estrin. He is the Coordinator of the Windham County Farm-to-School Network and PCS Greens Project. He has created a farm-to-school network that delivers fresh local farm produce from farms such as Westminster Organics and Green Mountain Orchards to eight school cafeterias that we service in Brattleboro VT and Bellows Falls VT. We are currently working with Hans to expand this service to include the Springfield VT school district as well.

Hans says "We are in this to be a helpful local distribution service— to connect as many schools as possible with some Farm Fresh Focus and Farm to School continue to be driving forces in schools and districts that we serve. During the fall local produce is abundant. We have taken advantage of the brisk harvest season and have featured locally grown apples, corn, and butternut squash.

Overcoming Seasonality

- As the winter approaches in New England, local vegetables are scarce. We have however, been able to identify foods that are locally produced. In December we featured Cape Cod cranberries. In January we will offer root vegetables such as sweet potatoes. During the month of February we are featuring Onions and plan to offer students the opportunity to sample a variety of products prepared with onions. March we will focus on turnip, and cabbage. It is important to note in

early spring that although weather improves, local produce is still difficult to find. We have been able to find products that will support local Farms. We are promoting local dairy products in April, and locally produced hydroponic tomatoes in May.

Conquering Supply Distribution

- The second big barrier to offering locally grown foods some local farms and produce. We clearly want to connect with and collaborate with existing FS programs in any way that makes sense.” We have also made these types of connections in New Hampshire, thanks in large part to NH Farm to School Coordinator Stacey Purslow, who has helped us facilitate a direct purchasing from Nottingham Farm, Moulton Farm and Booty Hill Farm to name just a few. Finally, price is always a barrier when deciding what to serve for school lunch. It is very difficult to prepare a 5-6 component lunch menu and serve it for between \$1.75 and \$2.50 labor included. Local produce, although very desirable, can also be expensive. We need to serve products while they are abundant and affordable. During the planning process we are working with Hans, Stacey, and local farmers to identify a growing schedule. This process will allow us to coordinate what produce will be available and when. It will also aid farmers to know what schools are looking for while they are planning their growing season for the upcoming year.

Success:

During the months of October and November we were able to serve organic locally grown lettuce in several school cafes. Supplies were abundant, product was delivered as scheduled, and the price was right!!!!