

## **In the lunchroom, the flavors are local**

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EASTHAMPTON - The food at the Williston Northampton School cafeteria last week hadn't traveled far. For the Massachusetts Harvest for Students Week, the school served up produce straight from the fields of Westhampton.

At least 100 Massachusetts school districts and colleges joined in the statewide initiative last week, putting locally grown foods at the center of its menus.

Kevin Martin, Williston's director of food services, said the majority of produce from the school's regular supplier isn't local. So he called Brad Morse, of Outlook Farm in Westhampton.

"Not everything has to come out of Florida or California," Martin said. "To see local produce come in at an equal price point or even a little less expensive and to have better quality is a win/win situation."

Morse, whose products are sold at Smith College year round, received Martin's call at one of his busiest times of the year.

"It's right smack in the middle of our harvest season," Morse said. "This is a peak week right here. It's hard when you're trying to produce and sell at the same time."

Morse "threw it all together" in a couple of hours before delivering the fruit and vegetables to Williston.

"Logistically, the hardest part is getting the produce on campus here," Martin said. "I don't have the time or the manpower to go out and get these so it's good to have someone like Brad who brings it right to our loading dock."

And from the loading dock to the kitchen it went.

"I got to tell ya, the items that he brought down were just beautiful," Martin said.

The produce - 14 heads of broccoli, 65 cucumbers, 25 pounds of peppers, 40 pounds of tomatoes and 40 pounds of apples - were a big cafeteria hit.

"His apples are phenomenal," Martin said. "They were so much shinier, a lot tastier, and just looking at them, they looked like such a better apple. Everyone in the kitchen was saying 'we have to get this more often.' "

Morse, who normally spends about 12 hours a week preparing produce for Smith College, met Martin when he was working in food services at Smith. Martin worked at Smith for 30 years before becoming director at Williston three years ago.

Morse added his farm to the list of farms seeking school customers for the Massachusetts Harvest for Students Week, which is organized by the Massachusetts Farm to School Project.

"It's a good initiative to make people aware that there are a lot of local farms out there," Martin said. "We have access to product that is wholesome."

Thomas Bashista, of Bashista Orchards in Southampton, brings his apples, pears and peaches to Hampshire Regional High School every week.

"For me it's real convenient because he'll deliver anytime I want anything I want," said Linda Hampson, food service director for Hampshire Regional. "I think the fresh fruit is more popular with us than the canned fruit."

Easthampton Public Schools did not participate in the Massachusetts Harvest for Students Week, but they do have local produce. Very local.

A Garden for eatin'

White Brook Middle School students enjoy their food from the ground up - literally. For more than three years, Jan DeUbl's two eighth-grade classes have studied, planted and watched their own sunflowers grow. Nearly 50 students have planted more than 100 sunflower plants in the White Brook garden, which also has melons, dry beans, herbs, grapes, apples, peaches, cherries, garlic, beets, potatoes, carrots, squash, popcorn and tomatoes.

"We're going to be harvesting in a couple of weeks," said Gail McKeague, director of food services for Easthampton schools. "We're going to utilize them (vegetables) for the entire month of October."

As the plants grow, so do the students' knowledge of botany. Last week they measured the sunflowers, which are 7 to 8 feet long. This week they studied and analyzed the anatomy of the sunflower. The next step is to package, market and sell their sunflower seeds. Jan DeUbl.

"Hopefully, they'll be coming to a store near you," said Hope Guardenier, director of School Sprouts Educational Garden, a business that designs and implements educational, hands-on garden classrooms in Easthampton, Williamsburg and Holyoke. Guardenier works with DeUbl's classes once a week.

The sunflower seeds will be available for purchase at the White Brook cafeteria this month. They will be sold at the same station where students buy granola bars and yogurt. Profit belongs to the students.

"It's their profit," Guardenier said. "It could go anywhere from a pizza party to next year's seed purchases. They raise the plants, so they will decide where the profits go. The idea is that they get a sense of what a business is like."

Potatoes from the garden will be roasted and served at White Brook and elementary schools this month.

"Last year it was a total success," Guardenier said. "Some kids were coming up for seconds. We ran out by the time the lunch period was over."

There was 25 pounds of potatoes last year. This year there are 50 pounds.

Around 100 students began fundraising for their one-acre garden Monday. They will continue knocking on doors and asking neighbors and members of the community for money until Wednesday. Much of their current funding came from White Brook building funds, which are overseen by Julie Salzman, principal.

Thanksgiving week will be the last the class meets this fall before hopefully meeting again in April.

"We are hoping that funding continues to allow the school garden to flourish," Guardenier said.

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