



Food and Society Policy Fellows

Locally grown produce in public schools

Submitted by Portland Public School District, Quotes Deborah Kane
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Harvest of the Month program brings Oregon grown produce into Portland public elementary schools

In cafeteria kitchens throughout the Portland Public School District, paring knives will be sharpened as foodservice staff get ready to prep and cook fresh, seasonal vegetables from scratch as part of the new Harvest of the Month lunch program. Developed by Portland Public Schools (PPS) Nutrition Services in partnership with Ecotrust's Food & Farms program, Growing Gardens, and other community partners, Harvest of the Month is designed to deliver farm direct fruits and vegetables to all area elementary schools for one day each month. Since 2001, Ecotrust's Food & Farms program has been investing in building direct market connections between farmers, ranchers, and fishermen and restaurant chefs, grocery retail buyers, institutions and distributors.

"Harvest of the Month affords a golden opportunity to introduce Oregon farmers into Portland Public School's food procurement network in a way that works for everyone," says Deborah Kane, vice president of Ecotrust's Food & Farms program. "Kids win, farmers win and the local economy wins when we maximize and sustain the agricultural resources that lay just beyond our urban boundaries."

Winter squash leads the roster of vegetables, debuting in all elementary schools and K-8 schools in February. Kids will be regaled with roasted potatoes in March, then spring vegetables such as asparagus, peas and strawberries in April through June. By offering one side dish at a time, Harvest of the Month program organizers hope to up the nutritional profile of school lunches, move more local food through the food procurement system and in the process engage children in the joys of eating foods the way nature intended.

"Harvest of the Month is one step toward realizing the vision PPS holds for school cafeterias as a model for health, wellness and food system sustainability," said Kristy Obbink, R.D., director of Nutrition Services at Portland Public Schools. "We see the cafeteria as a learning laboratory to introduce students to new local foods."

Harvest of the Month is an outgrowth of the learning at Abernethy Elementary, the school district's pilot farm to school program, which features among other attributes a cafeteria program serving meals made on site each day using fresh, local ingredients. This new program is the first step in expanding the best lessons learned at Abernethy district wide.

To prepare for the Harvest of the Month debut and months to come, nearly 150 cafeteria workers will be

learning how to slice, dice, roast and season fresh vegetables during two days of trainings. In addition to learning cooking techniques, cafeteria workers will hear presentations from farmers who are among the first Oregon growers to supply the school district with produce. Gene and Eileen Thiel will truck potatoes to town in March from Joseph, Ore., and Brandon Maes of Canby Asparagus Farm will supply 2,200 pounds of asparagus for May's Harvest of the Month.

Community partners will be engaged throughout the year to help expand on the Harvest of the Month offerings by linking students to information about the farmer supplying product, as well as developing activities to enhance nutritional and garden-based learning opportunities