

# Farm to School Program



## A Successful Effort That Supports Healthy Eating for Students and Community



Photo: Diane Dorfer, Cobblestone Farm CSA & Stephanie Richard, Director of Food Services

**Mansfield Public School's** "farm to school" program helps students get fresh, healthy meals at their school. The program teaches respect and appreciation for the local farmers that grow the food, and the agricultural land that sustains healthy food. Throughout the year we increase the number of "local tray days"

during National Farm to School Month in October. We work with eight different local farms and orchards in a school year.

A CT Department of Agriculture Farm Viability grant provided the school district with funds to obtain equipment and personnel support and pilot a central processing program. We participated in advanced planting arrangements where farmers plant crops to be specifically sold to Mansfield's Schools. This program allows us to purchase local produce in the summer months and process it for freezing, providing a sustainable source of produce throughout the school year. The grant has helped launch a program that will contribute to sustain local farming for years to come.

This summer we processed eggplant, green beans, kale, summer squash, zucchini, and beets, and plan on obtaining more items such as butternut squash and possibly corn. With school in session we can use local produce such as apples, peaches, tomatoes and greens, directly in our meal lines. We are waiting for items like

sweet bell peppers, in small kid-friendly sizes, that one of our farmers grows for us. These were a big hit with the students last year.

We also collaborate with other town stakeholders in a working group called "A Taste of Mansfield" event that connects the community and local farms in the Mansfield area. As part of this effort, we have hosted three community dinners with free admission to community members.

### Here's what participants in our farm to school program are saying:

*"Mansfield's "farm to school" program helps kids get fresh, healthy meals at school. It also teaches them respect and appreciation for the local farmers that grow the food and the agricultural land that sustains us."*

– Benjamin Wiles, Parent, Southeast Elementary School, member of Mansfield Sourcing and Quality

*"Kids can perform well in school when they are well nourished. It is important to me as a local farmer to help support our youth by providing healthy and delicious vegetables for school meals".*

– Susan Mitchell, Cloverleigh Farm

*"Students are increasingly aware of where their food comes from locally. One of our students spearheaded building a greenhouse at the middle school. Students now work and understand what it takes to provide food locally throughout the year."*

– Doug Perkins, Teacher, Mansfield Middle School

## About the Food Services Department

Director of Food Services Stephanie Richard manages five kitchens, four in Mansfield K-8 schools and EO Smith High School, and one in the farm to school program. The department has a staff 20 people, with two to seven employees in each self-operated kitchen.