

Summary of Farm to School Subcommittee

Urban Agriculture Policy Task Force

June 27, 2006

City kids dig fresh carrots!

What kid doesn't love crispy, crunchy, sun-sweetened, just-picked fruits and veggies?! They all do! The problem is not convincing kids to eat these foods but figuring out how to put these healthier food options within reach. Luckily, food grown by nearby farms (both in and around the City of Providence) offer that unbeatable flavor and freshness. Knowing this, our Farm to School subcommittee set to work to connect farms and schools in the Providence Region.

Healthy communities and local family farms go hand-in-hand!

Linking farms and schools is a great idea: Not only is the food fresher (which translates into kids eating more healthfully) but connecting city kids with the open space that surrounds them (both in the city and on the outskirts) is the simplest form of environmental education. Tomorrow's citizens need to know what fertile soil and open space means to them. They need to know where food comes from.

The idea needs to grow!

Over that past year, our Farm to School Subcommittee has brought together the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management/Division of Agriculture, the Rhode Island Department of Health, Southside Community Land Trust, Kids First, and Farm Fresh Rhode Island to collaborate around this goal:

- We wrote and submitted grant applications to fund a Rhode Island state-wide Farm-to-School Coordinator position for a minimum of two years and so far have raised \$24,000. We set a goal of having every school district in Rhode Island (36!) develop at least one purchasing relationship with a local farm by Fall 2008.
- We assisted in the planning of a local school district corn-shucking event in September 2005, which attracted lots of media attention and the attention of our state leaders, including our Director of the RI Department of Health.
- We initiated the introduction of two pieces of legislation, one that provides a tax credit to restaurants for purchasing local farm products and one that provides a tax incentive for middlemen who purchase locally grown farm products for the purpose of selling or providing them to schools.
- We have revised the RI Healthy Schools Coalition *Model Policy Language for School District Nutrition* to include the goal of purchasing produce from local farms and have included Farm-to-School materials in RI Department of Health

toolkits for RI school district's Wellness Subcommittees. Several Rhode Island school districts have included the goal of purchasing produce from local farms in their newly developed district wellness policies.

- We hosted a "Local Food Forum" to bring school food service directors together with farmers and attracted over 100 participants including our State's Directors of Health and Environmental Management.

And still, there's more:

- We networked with colleagues across the Northeast and learned about the development of a potential Farm-to-School pilot project to be conducted by Chartwells Corporation, a school food service management company currently operating in 12 Rhode Island schools districts. We successfully gained the commitment from Chartwells to choose Rhode Island as one of four states for their Farm-to-School pilot project. As a result of this, we are now working with the University of Rhode Island and the RI Division of Agriculture to re-invigorate and expand the GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) certification program for RI farmers, so as to meet Chartwells' requirements for their local farmer-suppliers. We are also providing Chartwells with contacts of potential farmer-suppliers.
- We advocated for the USDA Free Fruit and Vegetable Program for schools in Rhode Island, securing and submitting letters of support from the RI Departments of Education, Health and Environmental Management, as well as State and U.S. Senators and Representatives. We engaged Representative Patrick Kennedy, a member of the House Finance Committee, in requesting additional funds for this program so that Rhode Island would be able to participate.
- We developed, initiated, and widely publicized the Rhode Island "Happy Apple Award" for schools who successfully connect with local farmers. The first annual awards will be presented to one RI school district and two schools in Fall 2006 by the RI Department of Health, RI Division of Agriculture in partnership with Farm Fresh RI.
- We have engaged Sodexo Corporation, the School Food Service Management Company for Providence schools, in discussions about purchasing from local farms and have begun to identify farms for initial meetings.

And this is just the beginning.

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