SUPPORTING
Farm to School in Northwest Minnesota

WHAT HAS HAPPED IN THE PAST YEAR?

- March - Regional screenings of the documentary, “Growing our Future” were held in Thief River Falls, Bemidji. Dozens of viewers in each location discussed their own experience with Farm to School, and the value of connecting kids directly with farmers and the experience of growing food.

You can view the documentary online http://www.extension.umn.edu/farm-to-school/documentary/

- August - Farm-to-School training days were held in Crookston and Bemidji, providing in-service training that builds familiarity, skills and menu planning using local produce.

In the photo above, Extension Educator Deann Leines provides tips for increasing the nutritional value of lunches. Other sessions included knife skills, food safety on the farm, and salad bars.

- April - Statewide Health Improvement Program and Extension staff worked with schools to set up a planning and ordering form reflecting the new school lunch emphasis on green, red, yellow and orange vegetables. School dining services indicated how much of various vegetables they could use during Farm to School week in September.

- September - Fresh produce from farmers in the region was delivered to schools and prepared in school kitchens for lunch and snack programs. In many schools, the kids met the farmers that were growing for them.
FARM TO SCHOOL MONTH SUMMARY

One of the priorities for the 2012 promotion in Northwest Minnesota was to explore arrangements for aggregating produce from several farms. The McIntosh Country Store played the role of aggregator in eastern Polk County. Headwaters Foods, organized by Cheryl Krystosek, played a similar role in the Bemidji area. Many of the farmers involved in the Farm to School program also serve Farmers Markets in the region. There two marketing opportunities take widely different approaches to production and pricing. The month-long promotion aimed to learn what works for schools and farmers.

REFLECTIONS FROM FARMERS AND DINING SERVICES DIRECTORS

- Start small, at a scale that you can ensure success, and then build on that success each year.
- Involve kids in school gardens and field days to connect with farmers and growing food. Many schools in the region have started gardens.
- Find partners to share the load. Volunteers are needed for husking corn or picking beans. Extension Community Nutrition Educators help introduce kids to new foods in the lessons they teach.
- Emphasize products that are easy to handle in the school kitchen setting, where time, labor and money are all limited. Potatoes, tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, zucchini, melons, radishes, onions and garlic are consistently listed as products that work well for schools.
- School kitchens need equipment to handle fresh, whole product. Many of the kitchens have a ‘wish list’ or more accurately a ‘need list’ that includes tools like commercial scale food processors for slicing and dicing, steamers and combi-ovens.
- If you are interested in learning more about how schools and other cafeterias are working with farmers, join us at the White Earth Tribal College in Mahnomen on Monday, February 4, 2013, from 3:30 to 7:30 pm. The workshop in Mahnomen will include peer-learning though presentations of practical experience and innovation in the region; panel discussion about making logistics and pricing work for farmers and cafeterias; presentation on contracts and agreements between farmers and cafeterias and tools and resources for strengthening community food systems. We’ll enjoy a supper meal and generous time for networking.

Prepared by Linda Kingery, U of M Extension Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership
kinge002@umn.edu 218-281-8697