



Serving Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet & Otsego Counties

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Photo Caption: Lynne DeMoor, Community Health Coordinator at Health Department of Northwest Michigan; Jane Babcock, Petoskey High School Teacher; Kalli Ross, Petoskey High School Student; Jen Schaap, Food Policy Specialist at Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities; Beth Kavanaugh, Food Service Director at Petoskey Schools.

Eating Local: Petoskey Schools Partners with Groundwork Center and Health Department to Support Further Farm to School Initiatives

After being awarded a USDA Farm to School Grant in July, Petoskey Schools, Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities and the Health Department of Northwest Michigan have been working to support more farm-to-school initiatives to help set the groundwork for healthy habits for students.

The Health Department and Groundwork have been guiding a Farm to School Coordinating Team made up of farmers, community partners, parents, teachers, and ideally students. Current projects include planning school gardens, farm field trips, and having a presence at school events. Including more locally grown produce is just one component of a farm to school program. The overall goals of farm to school programs are to increase access to local food and nutrition education, strengthen family farms, and explore where food comes from and how it grows. Pop-up farmers markets at the elementary schools in the fall and recent carnival events have been venues where Farm to School team members have been available. Recently, a Farm to School logo contest for Petoskey Schools was launched at the middle and high schools. Kalli Ross, a senior, created the winning design after Business Class teacher, Jane Babcock, encouraged her students to turn in designs.

The Farm to School Coordinating Team will be turning in an Action Plan to the USDA with the next steps for Petoskey Schools to take to expand the farm to school initiative further. In addition to expanding the amount of locally sourced vegetables and fruits, activities could include tasting panels to support new menu items for the cafeteria, Jr. Iron Chef competitions, integrating farm to school into the curriculum, bringing farmers to the



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schools, and more. Ideally this plan will help land further funds to support these activities. While this time is considered a planning phase, it hasn't stopped current efforts to include healthy options in Petoskey Schools.

Currently, sixty-eight percent of fruits and vegetables served in the lunchrooms of the Public Schools of Petoskey are locally sourced (within 50-100 miles from Petoskey). Food Service Director, Beth Kavanaugh, wants to make that number grow. Kavanaugh noted that, "students have developed a preference for the fresh taste of locally grown lettuce, carrots, beets, apples, cherries, pea pods, green beans and more". A major indicator of this preference is less food waste going into the trash after lunch.

The Health Department and Groundwork have both supported the elementary school Try-It Tuesday program, which is now in its 4th year and includes both Montessori and St. Francis schools, also served by the Petoskey Schools Food Service. Try-It Tuesday provides an opportunity for students to learn about and sample a locally grown fruit or vegetable in their classroom on the 2nd Tuesday of every month. Students love Try-It Tuesday and parents do too. One of the comments we hear most often is that children are more likely to try new things at home, too.

If you are interested in joining the Farm to School Coordinating Team, please contact Lynne DeMoor, Community Health Coordinator, Health Department of Northwest Michigan l.demoor@nwhealth.org or Jen Schaap, Food Policy Specialist, Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities jen@groundworkcenter.org. We can always use help with garden maintenance over the summer and Try-It Tuesday volunteers to visit classrooms and run a short tasting experience with the students!

The Health Department of Northwest Michigan is mandated by the Michigan Public Health Code to promote wellness, prevent disease, provide quality healthcare, address health problems of vulnerable populations, and protect the environment for the residents and visitors of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego counties. For more information, visit nwhealth.org.

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