

Healthy Northland Farm to School

Why Farm to School?

Farm to School programs make healthy choices easier and accessible for all students by getting more local fruits and vegetables into school cafeterias. **It works - the programs have been shown to increase the number of fruits and vegetables kids eat by one daily serving.¹**

Farm to School starts on the lunch tray, but students also learn about where their food comes from by visiting farms and tending school gardens. Agriculture shows up in the classroom in a wide range of subjects and schools keep money in the local economy, supporting farmers and producers.

This work is more important today than it's ever been. Over the past three decades, childhood obesity rates in America have tripled, and today, nearly one in three children in America are overweight or obese. If trends continue, one-third of all children born in 2000 or later will suffer from diabetes at some point in their lives. The increase in obesity is tied to unhealthier eating and less physical activity.²

Northeastern Minnesota is no exception - according to the 2016 Minnesota Student Survey, ten percent of ninth-graders in



Seventh graders at Ordean East Middle School in Duluth show off the produce from their garden in fall 2016 during Life Science Garden Days. Photo: Aaron Salmela

Minnesota are obese, a number that increased a percentage point in the last three years.³ 53 percent of fifth-grade girls in Northeastern Minnesota reported not eating the recommended servings of fruit in the previous week, and 61 percent didn't eat enough vegetables.⁴ These trends show up across all age groups surveyed.

In December 2014, the Carlton-Cook-Lake-St. Louis Community Health Board received a \$100,000 grant from the United States Department of Agriculture, and just a few months later, a \$34,000 grant was awarded by the Victory Fund. The grants supported Healthy Northland Farm to School initiatives in Duluth and Lake County in Northeastern Minnesota.



The best Farm to School programs incorporate the "3 Cs"
Cafeteria
Classroom
Community

1,725 students were directly impacted by Farm to School efforts in Duluth *in the classroom*

At schools across Duluth, from elementary to senior high, students reaped the benefits of the Farm to School program.

Teachers found creative ways across the city to use the school gardens in their lesson plans. Students learned about traditional American Indian garden methods, studied the intricate details of the blossoming plants and drew them in art class and tapped their math and construction skills to help build hoop houses. Family and consumer science classes harvested produce to use in the kitchen. The growing gardens also proved useful for hands-on biology and life science lessons.

Students even spent time after school in the gardens, forming garden clubs to care for the plants during the summer growing season.



Kindergartners at Congdon Park Elementary planting tomatoes with East High School students. Photo: Renee Willemsen

Gardening at Congdon Park Elementary

Planting the school garden is a school-wide project at Congdon Park Elementary. When planting the 2016 garden, classes signed up for half hour sessions and rotated through four stations: planting, mosaic bench tiling, friend vs. foe garden plants and mulching.

Each grade also took on a special project. Kindergartners and first graders were paired with East High School students for the Tomato Man Project. Third graders learned about the American Indian tradition of planting corn, beans and squash together, also known as Three Sister companion gardening. The fourth graders built hoop houses and helped design the garden, using variable analysis and math skills. Fifth graders worked on seed saving, experimented with growing methods and cooked and served a feast using the Three Sisters crops.

"I learned that the Ojibwe used companion gardening when growing Three Sisters gardens," said a Congdon Elementary student. "They stored everything and it helped them get through the winters. The Three Sisters stew we made was phenomenal."



Fifth-graders at Congdon Elementary work on their "Three Sisters" feast in their school's kitchen. They used traditional American Indian companion gardening to grow the crops, and then cooked a stew from the harvest. Photo: Renee Willemsen

225

hours of training for school kitchen staff *in the cafeteria*

"What I liked best about the training is learning new recipes and working with people from other schools," said one of the cafeteria managers who participated in a training. "New experiences are always useful."

Through the Victory Fund grant, the Healthy Northland Farm to School team conducted nine food service trainings, led by Arlene Coco, a local culinary expert. She will be publishing a free e-book of the recipes developed for the trainings. Here's one of the recipes:

Autumn Tomato and Corn Salad

6 Servings

Preparation: 25 minutes

- 1 pound corn kernels, fresh or frozen
- 3 large tomatoes, diced
- 1/2 cup mozzarella cheese, shredded
- 1/4 cup fresh basil, chopped
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- salt and pepper to taste

In a large bowl, toss together the corn, tomatoes, cheese, basil, lemon juice, vinegar, salt and pepper. Chill until serving.



A staff member in a Duluth school, above, shows off the new salad spinner in the school's kitchen. The spinners, purchased through the USDA grant, make preparing lettuce for the entire school easier and quicker. An East High School student, bottom left, votes to keep a new recipe on the menu. Throughout the Farm to School program, cafeteria staff would try out new recipes and give students the chance to test taste and vote on whether they liked them or not. Photos: Renee Willemssen

- **Thirty-five percent** more local food was purchased in the 2015-2016 school year compared to the previous year, thanks to the USDA grant. In addition, **1,300 pounds** of produce were harvested from school gardens.
- Duluth schools started serving **Minnesota Thursday meals**, sourcing all the food for one meal per month from Minnesota.
- More than **5,000 students** got to test taste and vote on new recipes, and food service staff gave input on menu changes. Staff learned new techniques for processing fresh produce at an industrial level, and tried out 43 new recipes.
- More than **7,500 students** participated in an Apple Crunch celebrating National Farm to School Month.

\$90,500 Funds leveraged in the community

Volunteers worked more than 600 hours throughout the duration of the grant to help the program succeed. In the fall of 2016, Essentia Health volunteers worked with the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP), SNAP-Ed and Farm to School to help eighth graders at Lincoln Park Middle School harvest produce from their school garden. Students then cooked recipes and created posters featuring the harvested produce. The strong partnership with SHIP has also been instrumental with Farm to School Tastings in School Cafeterias & Classrooms.

The community played a huge role in student field trips as well, with farmers allowing students to visit their land and adult volunteers accompanying to help the students learn. Duluth students visited the University of Minnesota - Duluth's Sustainable Agriculture Project, rotating through stations to learn about the different pieces of farming. The UMD farm produces 50,000 pounds of food annually for the school's dining services.

"The farm is where education and operations come together, creating a sustainable evolution of ideas and action," Randel Hanson, Director of the project, told WDIO TV in Duluth. "In UMD's land lab, students see practically the entire food cycle, first hand. Students get to learn about how to work with nature to get what we need - food - in ways that don't harm nature."

"I liked picking squash the best," Sheway Jimenez, a seventh grader on a field trip to a local farm, told the Duluth Budgeteer newspaper. "I've never picked one before."



An Essentia Health volunteer helps Lincoln Park Middle School students harvest produce from their school garden. Community partnerships are an essential part of Farm to School. Photo: Renee Willemssen

- 1: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/chp/cdrn/nutrition/FTS/aboutFTS.html>
- 2: <http://www.letsmove.gov/learn-facts/epidemic-childhood-obesity>
- 3: http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/mss/Health-related_fact_sheet_MSS_2016_10-31-16.pdf
- 4: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/mss/regionaltables/northeast16.pdf>

Learn more:

 Healthy Northland Farm to School www.healthynorthland.org, 218-733-2860

