

News Release
12-22-14

CABELL MIDLAND STUDENT USING FARM TO SCHOOL PROFITS TO ADD SECOND HIGH TUNNEL

Students throughout West Virginia have been putting dollars in their pockets by participating in the state's Farm To School (FTS) program. Usually the money helps with college tuition, car expenses or a new electronic gadget.

But if you ask Cabell Midland High School student Zach Call where his money is going, he'll tell you "nowhere." It's all being rolled back into his farming operation that now features a second high tunnel that allows year-round production of produce he sells to his county school system and elsewhere.

Last year, he was the second-leading FTS student producer in the state. And although he's still a student, he's providing a variety of products to every school in Cabell County.

"Hopefully, I'll double production and keep busy. I'd like to do this as a career when I'm out of school," said Call. "Everybody wants something that's local any more. They're getting away from the grocery stores," he explained.

Particularly popular with the schools are his lettuce and cucumbers. For the kitchen staff, those products don't take a great deal of preparation time to get them ready for the salad bar, and they're items that are especially appealing when they're super-fresh – just the way Call provides them.

His eggs are also popular at area schools, and he grows tomatoes, butternut squash and potatoes for the school system, restaurants and the Wild Ramp, the farmers' market he frequents. Sheep are sold to those wanting a custom-slaughtered product and as packaged retail products at the Wild Ramp. The family's cattle typically are sold at auction, said Call, the fourth generation in his family to farm. He'd like to see student-grown meat in schools, although he concedes that that might be down the road a bit because of processing bottlenecks and marketing difficulties.

FTS remains his prime market though. With the state spending about \$100 million on school food overall each year, it's a potential market for farmers that remains essentially untapped. Cabell County alone spent \$3.7 million on school food overall during the previous school year.

"It's gotten better as time has gone on," he said. "We've figured out the problems, worked out the kinks and it seems to be running pretty good right now."

For example, other students in the FFA chapter had problems getting food delivered to schools. Now they can drop it off at a central location and it will be delivered to individual schools.

Trevor Cummings, Agriculture Instructor at Cabell Midland and the school's FTS coordinator

thinks Call's attitude is what makes him so successful.

"He has a tremendous inner pride for what he does," said Cummings. "I think that's the reason he excels at what he does, plus he has a good opportunity at home. It's above and beyond what other students do."

Cummings said a local farmer lets his students use land for projects.

"Zach has jumped up and said he'd like to use some of that land to produce even more, possibly potatoes," said Cummings.

West Virginia's FTS effort is spearheaded by the West Virginia Farm To School Community Development Group (WVFTSCDG), a public / private task force made up of the West Virginia Department of Education, the West Virginia Department of Agriculture, The West Virginia University Extension Small Farm Center, New Appalachian Farm and Research Center, and the Collaborative for the 21st Century Appalachia.

The goals of the group are to increase the amount of local foods served in schools and to develop the next generation of farmers in West Virginia. Schools have doubled the amount of local food purchased the last two years in a row. Schools purchased \$650,000 worth of food from local sources in 2013-2014 – double the \$350,000 they spent in 2012-2013 – including \$50,000 worth of food from student suppliers.

For more information about Farm To School opportunities, contact Buddy Davidson at bdavidson@wvda.us or 304-541-5932, visit www.groweducatesell.com, or www.facebook.com.wvfarm2school.