

News Release

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FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAM MEETS SUCCESS IN GREENBRIER COUNTY *Schools integrating local foods to cafeteria and classroom*

Greenbrier County is no stranger to agriculture. It boasts the third highest number of farms in the state at 819, and it has one of the state's largest FFA programs. Perhaps this is why the county's Farm To School program (FTS) has enjoyed such success at both the middle and high school level.

FFA member Alex Hanna of Renick says he has been growing crops for as long as he can remember. This past year, with the help of his family, advisors, and fellow ag students, Alex raised sweet corn to be sold in Kanawha County schools. When all was said and done, Alex sold several thousand ears of fresh sweet corn to 15 different schools in Kanawha County.

The sweet corn sale, which was also a part of Alex's SAE (Supervised Agricultural Experience) project, was a huge step for the fairly young Farm To Schools program in Greenbrier County.

"We are starting to get more [involvement] and we have several students in Ag that have provided different varieties of crops. Hopefully the program gets even stronger, and of course I plan to continue to be involved in that and sell produce to local schools in Greenbrier and neighboring counties," he said.

"We got all positive feedback. They were happy and I felt good exposing the kids to fresh and healthy food. It was hard work, but it was worth it in the end."

The Farm To Schools program in Greenbrier County has also brought local and student grown products to the county's own school cafeterias. Eastern Greenbrier Middle School and Western Greenbrier Middle School have seen the development of a cafeteria "garden bars" composed of fresh vegetables and fruits produced by students and local small farms.

County Child Nutrition Coordinator Jenny Curry is responsible for helping to bring the program to the county and for organizing the process. Curry said that she buys fresh produce from ten farmers in the Greenbrier area, but there are more registering that she intends to add to the FTS program. She noted that several registered farmers are putting up high tunnel greenhouses to provide fresh produce for schools in the winter. So far, the Farm To Schools program has helped add farm fresh eggs, sweet corn, romaine lettuce, radishes, sweet potatoes, squash and strawberries to Greenbrier cafeterias.

Curry credited AmeriCorps worker Emily Landseidel for her work in the county's two middle schools. Working through the County Child Nutrition office, Landseidel has acted as the Farm to School Coordinator for Greenbrier County, helping to integrate fresh foods into the cafeteria and agricultural awareness in the classrooms of Greenbrier County's two middle schools.

As she puts it, "I'm just trying to nurse these middle school minds into big, agricultural dreamers." Funded by the Federal Choices Grant, Landseidel helped the students at Eastern Greenbrier Middle School build and plant a vegetable garden that includes broccoli, kale, onions, lettuce and radishes. While Landseidel is the program coordinator, she says that a lot of the work, including the design of the gardens, is done entirely by the students.

"The kids are ultimately why I'm here," she said. "And if they are more engaged because it looks more welcoming and inviting that is the major goal – to get them interested in local food and how things grow." While it may not be in the traditional straight lines of most standard gardens, the concentric circles of the Eastern Greenbrier Middle School gardens offer an inviting look into the hands on classroom that the Farm to School program has generated."

Jenny Curry purchases food from the garden for the school cafeteria's garden bar. "I may buy a bag of radishes here or five bags of Romaine, but that's ok. That's their stuff on the garden bar and they're proud of that," she said.

Landseidel has also been instrumental in bringing the garden into the classroom. "All of the students for one period a day have a flex class. During that time, teachers have the flexibility to work on things that don't necessarily fit immediately into the content standards," she noted.

Landseidel uses these flex classes to teach Greenbrier middle school students lessons in gardening, foods, and practical agriculture. In one flex class, Landseidel says, "I introduced a class to a worm bin, and now we're talking about how to compost food using worms and how worms work."

The gardening program at the Greenbrier middle schools has also opened the gate for agricultural enrichment programs and summer school sessions, where students can get more hands-on experience in the school gardens.

Emily Landseidel smiles in her pink Farm To School t-shirt, a measure of pride in her expression. "Does it engage them and get them involved in actively learning about their surroundings and how different things function on this planet?" She laughs. "Yes. Definitely."