



From Farm to School: Changing Eating Habits One Plate at a Time
South Euclid Lyndhurst School District
December 2011





The South Euclid Lyndhurst Farm to School program is a collaboration between the South Euclid Lyndhurst School District, AVI Fresh, Red Basket Farm and the Cuyahoga County Board of Health. The school district became the first Farm to School Program in Cuyahoga County in September 2010.



Introduction

Growing awareness of the adverse health consequences associated with poor dietary choices have expanded interest in the nutritional quality of food served in school cafeterias. The current economic crisis is also affecting the health status of both students and families by limiting household food budgets.

During the school day, children consume roughly one-third of their nutritional needs while eating at school. However, only two percent of school-aged children meet the recommendations for all five food groups. Similarly, less than one in five children consumes the recommended number of fruits and vegetables, and the vast majority consume excessive amounts of fat and sodium.

The Farm to School program, which integrates produce from a local grower into a school's foodservice, aims to increase the supply of fresh, local nutritious foods; develop smarter food decision-making among students; supports connections with local farmers; develops community connections; and fosters reinvestment in the state and local economy. The program provides a new and innovative approach for school districts interested in addressing food access issues among students.

The South Euclid Lyndhurst School District, in partnership with the Cuyahoga County Board of Health (CCBH) and Red Basket Farm, implemented the first Farm to School program in Cuyahoga County in September 2010. The school meal program, managed by AVI Fresh, now features lettuce, potatoes, apples, tomatoes, and peppers on lunch menus district-wide. The produce now travels from fifty-nine miles away as opposed to the twenty-six hundred miles it was previously traveling. This reduction in miles means food stays fresher longer and that the school district is not only reducing its carbon footprint, but is also reinvesting in the local economy.

South Euclid Lyndhurst School District

The South Euclid Lyndhurst School District has approximately 4,000 students across six school campuses. Over the past sixteen years (1995-2011), the district has experienced changing demographics. In 1995, there was limited diversity in the student population and only two percent of the student population was eligible for free and reduced priced meals. In 2011, fifty percent of the student population is eligible for free and reduced priced meals and embraces over seventy percent minority students. Today, fifty-eight percent of students in the district (over 2,400) participate in the school meal program. The Farm to School program provides students access to fresh fruits and vegetables, foods students may not have access to outside the school day.

One barrier typically cited in Farm to School implementation is cost associated with serving fresh produce. In the South Euclid Lyndhurst School District, even given the rise in food costs the district has been able to keep school breakfast and lunch prices relatively unchanged. The district was able to maintain current pricing as food costs remained the same even with utilizing a local grower and there was no increase in labor hours associated with serving fresh produce.

Breakfast/Lunch Prices

- 2010-2011 School Year
K-6: \$1.75/\$2.50
7-12: \$1.75/\$2.75
- 2011-2012 School Year*
K-6: \$1.80/\$2.60
7-12: \$1.80/\$2.85

(*note slight increase in prices partially attributed to the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010)

Red Basket Farm

Red Basket Farm is a small, family-owned farm located in Kinsman, Ohio. The farm started in 2002 and today grows over seventy varieties of vegetable crops using sustainable and natural farming practices. The use of cover crops, crop rotations, compost and other natural fertilizers by the farm, help to promote healthy soils, which produce healthy plants for better tasting and longer lasting food. The Red Basket Farm, through the use of high-tunnel greenhouses has been able to expand its growing season to nearly 12 months of the year, providing fresh greens and other items even in

the coldest winter months. Prior to the farm to school program, owner Floyd Davis had been primarily working with restaurants and participating at area farmers markets.

Cuyahoga County Board of Health

The unfunded School Wellness Policy, enacted in 2006 in districts across the country, has been met with mixed results. While one intended purpose of the legislation was to mitigate the childhood obesity epidemic by addressing the areas of school nutrition and the built environment to positively impact dietary behavior and eating patterns, results have been limited at best

In 2009, the CCBH conducted a survey of school-level administrators to assess the importance of wellness policies to schools, the barriers and successes encountered with implementation and evaluation, and to determine how the CCBH might best provide technical assistance with the policy. Through the responses of seventy-four individuals (39.4% were administrators) from 25 school districts, the CCBH learned that:

- Only 33.3% of schools were actively implementing their policy
- 39.4% agree that wellness policies have a positive impact on student health and academic achievement
- The majority of activities taking place focused on nutrition or physical activity to reduce childhood obesity, rather than nutritional policy changes
- The barriers to moving the policy forward include time, money, and dedicated staff

Shortly after the survey, in response to Ohio's childhood obesity epidemic, on June 18, 2010 Ohio legislators enacted Senate Bill 210. The law intends to combat childhood obesity over the next several years by increasing students' physical activity and ensuring access to healthy meals and beverages at school. To address the new requirements of this legislation, in addition to the federal wellness policy mandate, the CCBH selected the Farm to School program as an evidenced-based program to advance policy and system change strategy.

The above mentioned survey enabled the CCBH to identify a school district with a renewed interest in addressing student health through the implementation of new and innovative evidence-based strategies. The South Euclid Lyndhurst School District agreed to become the seminal district for implementation of the first Farm to School program in Cuyahoga County. A separate survey process also allowed CCBH to identify a local grower, Red Basket Farm, who was already working in the County and was interested in establishing a relationship with a school district.

Farm to School Program Rollout

After four months of planning, the Farm to School program culminated with a kick-off event on September 29, 2010, as the district became the first school district in Cuyahoga County to implement Farm to School. The school menu featured a salad bar with locally grown produce from Red Basket Farm and the students were given the opportunity to meet their grower, Floyd Davis. The program was launched at Greenview Upper Elementary School and was rolled out district wide over the next six weeks. By November 2010, the district was receiving approximately 300lbs of local produce a week.

Farm to School Impacts: 2010-2011 Academic Year

The inaugural year of the South Euclid Lyndhurst Farm to School Program led to a diverse number of impacts, ranging from child nutrition improvements, to economic impact, to increased funding opportunities.

- *Increased lunch participation*
 - Approximately 7.5% increase in school meal participation rate from 2009-2010 school to 2010-2011 school year
 - Interestingly, the largest participation increase was seen in grades 7-12
 - Memorial Junior High – 13.1% increase
 - Brush High School – 9.3% increase
- *Increase in dollars spent in local food economy*
 - 2009-2010 school year: 0% (\$0) of produce budget spent in Ohio food economy
 - 2010-2011 school year: 7% (approximately \$2,500) of produce budget spent in Ohio food economy

**Note, no increase in food cost when utilizing a local grower as opposed to ordering through main vendor*
- *Increased revenue:*
 - Estimated increased revenue due to Farm to School implementation: Over \$50,000 annually
 - No increase in food costs per meal or total labor hours

- *Funding Opportunities*
 - \$18,000 awarded from the Great American Salad Bar project to fund a salad bar, serving utensils and related equipment, and training videos for each school building
 - \$2,000 from the Ohio Department of Agriculture to host Farm to Family nights, an educational opportunity for parents to learn more about the Farm to School program and meet Floyd Davis, the owner of Red Basket Farm
 - \$1,500 from the CCBH Child and Family Health Services grant to establish a school garden at Brush High School
 - \$18,000 from Fuel Up to Play 60

Other Wellness Initiatives:

Implementation of the Farm to School program has been the catalyst for numerous wellness initiatives within the district. Inactive for the past few years, the district wellness committee now meets monthly and is in the process of planning and implementing many new and innovative wellness initiatives. Positive side effects from program implementation include:

- Implementation of breakfast in the classroom
- First ever staff health screening and wellness day during professional development day
- Cooking demonstrations provided by the Foodservice Director
- Establishment of a school garden through the afterschool program, complete with field trips to Red Basket Farm and hands-on learning opportunities
- New fundraising guidelines district-wide
- Wellness Policy revision

Farm to School Goals: 2011-2012 Academic Year

The successful implementation of Farm to School during the 2010-2011 school year is leading to further expansion of the program for the 2011-2012 school year in South Euclid Lyndhurst.

Goals for the upcoming year include:

- Source 80-90% of district produce from Red Basket Farm
- Alter menu planning to match up with Ohio growing season
- Utilize Red Basket Farm during December and January
- Host Farm to Fork Night
- Establish three school gardens

- Create pre-consumer compost program

It is the hope that program expansion will increase market demand for fresh produce, increase the capacity of local growing operations, and foster continued reinvestment in the local economy.

Farm to School Sustainability

On December 12, 2011, the South Euclid Lyndhurst School District became the first school district in the State of Ohio to have a Board Approved School Wellness Policy containing Farm to School language. Implementing a policy such as this further demonstrates the district's commitment to provide fresh, wholesome meals to students.

Highlights of the policy language include:

- The District shall encourage each school to establish a school garden, to be used as an outdoor classroom for nutrition, science, and other lessons.
- Staff shall integrate experiential education activities, such as gardening, cooking demonstrations, farm and farmers' market tours, into existing curricula.
- Nutrition education messages from the classroom will be modeled in the cafeteria and across campus by offering locally-grown food whenever possible within the reimbursable federal meal program, as well as a la carte sales.
- School food service, in partnership with other school departments and community organizations, will work to creatively market and promote locally-produced food to students, through activities such as:
 - Featuring food grown in the school garden in the cafeteria through sampling and inclusion in school meals based upon availability and acceptability.
 - Developing cafeteria themes relating to local farmers and products grown in the region.
 - Developing creative campus fundraisers based on healthy food items, integrating farm grown produce where appropriate.
- Meals served within the federally reimbursable meal program will be designed to feature fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods from local sources to the greatest extent possible.
- Schools are encouraged to offer locally grown food at every location on the school site where food is sold and in all school-sponsored events and activities.

Conclusion

Greater Cleveland and Northeast Ohio has been a mecca for the local food movement, with over 200 community gardens and an increasing number of area farmers working to build a sustainable local economy around fresh produce. These local growers hold the promise of job opportunities and offer ideal venues for educating students on cultivation of produce and the nutritional benefits of these endeavors. By introducing and implementing the Farm to School program, the South Euclid Lyndhurst School District, AVI Fresh, Red Basket Farm, and the Cuyahoga County Board of Health now have the ability to provide an avenue for students to access fresh fruits and vegetables, to educate both students and parents about the relationships between dietary choices and health outcomes, to build non-traditional partnerships, and to reinvest in Ohio's economy. The South Euclid Lyndhurst project hopes to serve as a model for future farm to table initiatives in Cuyahoga County.



For more information about the South Euclid Lyndhurst Farm to School project, please contact Alison Patrick at (216) 201-2001 x 1513 or apatrick@ccbh.net