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UNH Initiates Program to Link Schools and Farms

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UNH Initiates Program to Link Schools and Farms

DURHAM, N.H. -- To what extent do school meals programs represent viable market opportunities for New Hampshire farms, as well as nutritional and educational opportunities for children?

The University of New Hampshire's Office of Sustainability Programs (OSP), in partnership with the N.H. Coalition for Sustaining Agriculture, is responding to that question with the development of the first New Hampshire Farm to School Program. This project is supported by a three-year $76,000 USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research Education grant. The remaining 24% of the budget is covered by university funds. It is supported by a three-year USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research Education grant.

The Farm to School Program is an initial step toward creating a sustainable, community-based food system example that can be expanded to support additional, expandable business and educational programs that connect New Hampshire farms and farm products to K-12 classrooms and cafeterias throughout the state, according to Julie Newman, OSP education program director.

"By connecting schools with farms, we hope to achieve two goals," she says. "First, we want to help fruit, vegetable and dairy farmers develop a source of local income for their produce. Second, we want to help students become more familiar with the source of their food and recognize the choices they have in supporting the local food economy.

In the first year, 72 New Hampshire schools are participating in the Farm to School program. It was launched with the distribution of locally grown apples, which are being supplied by R.C. Hetnar Orchards, Inc. in Epping. The ultimate goal of the program is to expand to other products, with input from participating food service directors and in collaboration with local farmers.

An interactive, hands-on teacher workshop for K-12 educators from all disciplines will be held at the UNH Manchester campus, Saturday, March 27, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. The workshop titled, "Developing a Farm to School Curriculum for Your Classroom," is offered through the UNH Department of Continuing Education. It will draw from a broad range of materials and resources to help educators develop their own place-based curriculum, explore approaches to linking classroom activities with cafeteria and lunch room experiences, and learn about the impact of food choices for health and community well-being.
For more information about the teacher workshop and/or the New Hampshire Farm to School Program, contact Julie Newman, at the Office of Sustainability Programs at 862-4088 or go to www.nhfarmtoschool.org.