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September 17, 2012

NH Farm to School Report: More Farms Bringing Greater Variety to NH Schools

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A new survey from New Hampshire Farm to School, a statewide organization housed at the University of New Hampshire, found that the number of New Hampshire farmers providing food to local schools has tripled in the past three years and the variety of food they're offering has increased. Credit: New Hampshire Farm to School

DURHAM, N.H. – Eating local is not just for foodies and high-end restaurants: in New Hampshire, school kids are increasingly getting into the act. A new survey from New Hampshire Farm to School found that the number of New Hampshire farmers providing food to local schools has tripled in the past three years and the variety of food they're offering has increased.

[The report](#), released today, highlights trends and findings from three years (2009, 2010, 2011) of surveys of New Hampshire farmers and school food service directors conducted by New Hampshire Farm to School (NHFTS).

“For the farmers, this provides another market for them to sell their produce,” says Stacey Purslow, program coordinator for NHFTS, a statewide organization that is housed within the University of New Hampshire’s Sustainability Institute. “And for the schools, it’s an opportunity to get fresh and local produce. Buying directly from the farmer, there’s a freshness and flavor difference. The food tastes better.” Purslow adds that better tasting fruits and vegetables are more likely to pass muster with students.

Other key findings of the survey include:

- Schools are purchasing a more diverse array of local foods. While apples – NHFTS’s original “crop” when it launched in 2003 – and tomatoes remain the most popular items, schools are also purchasing corn, cucumbers, beans, blueberries, maple syrup, beef, eggs, and fish.
- Despite economically tough times, schools continue to spend hundreds of dollars each fall on local food. Forty percent of the schools surveyed spent between \$100 and \$499 on local food in fall 2011, and 26 percent of schools spent more than \$1,000.
- Although more than 300 schools and 60 farms participate in the program, lack of resources – money, equipment, or time – remains a barrier to greater participation. Among the schools participating in the survey, 26 percent (up from 24 percent in 2010) indicated that expense was a barrier to purchasing local food. Schools also reported that insufficient labor to handle fresh food (15 percent) and limited refrigeration or equipment (14 percent) affected their ability to buy local food.

Established in 2003 as a pilot program to introduce local apples and cider into New Hampshire K-12 schools, NHFTS serves as a facilitator engaging farmers, distributors, food service directors, teachers, health educators and administrators in adopting farm to school practices. In addition to negotiating

simple, affordable systems for purchase of locally grown and produced foods by schools, NHFTS helps schools integrate farms, food, and nutrition into their curriculum and explore food and agriculture-based learning opportunities. Learn more at www.nhfarmtoschool.org.

Such sustainable food work is part of the Sustainability Institute at UNH. Sustainability is a core value of UNH, shaping culture, informing behavior, and guiding work. As a nationally recognized leader, the Sustainability Institute acts as convener, cultivator and champion of sustainability on campus, in the state and region, and around the world. Learn more at www.sustainableunh.unh.edu.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

Photograph available to download: <http://unh.edu/news/releases/2012/sept/student.jpg>

Caption: A new survey from New Hampshire Farm to School, a statewide organization housed at the University of New Hampshire, found that the number of New Hampshire farmers providing food to local schools has tripled in the past three years and the variety of food they're offering has increased.

Credit: New Hampshire Farm to School

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