



A Food Revolution is Changing Marin's Schools

By Erin Howes, Science Interchange Reporter

(This article was published in the Marin Scope Community Newspaper of Sept. 11-17, 2001)

In preparation for the new school year, Cathy Sinclair, the school garden coordinator at Novato Charter School, is in the process of moving her garden to the school's new location. "I want to make sure the kids have fresh food right outside the classroom," she said. Sinclair, who has worked with over 20 Marin schools in the last two years to help them rejuvenate or start a new garden, has plans to expand her school's garden this year, providing students with more vegetables, fruit, and even edible flowers.

Sinclair's garden is a part of the Marin County Food System Project. The goal of this project is to bring produce from school gardens and local farms into school cafeterias. The food project is supported by the Environmental Education Council of Marin, the Center for Ecoliteracy, the Marin Community Foundation, Marin County Health and Human Services, Marin Agricultural Land Trust, Marin Organics, teachers, farmers, and passionate community members.

"I believe that it's critical for kids to understand where the food they consume comes from," said Sandy Wallenstein, executive director for the Environmental Education Council of Marin. "So many kids today have no idea that there are farms right near where they live. The dream of the project is to integrate agricultural education into the classroom curriculum."

Dave Cort, coordinator of the San Geronimo Healthy Community Collaborative at the Lagunitas School District, will be working with the district's Nutrition Advisory Council to implement the first school district food policy passed in Marin schools. The intent is to increase the health of the entire community through education, garden interaction, and the improvement of school food.

This year, Cort is working with Marin Organics and the Marin Food System Project to organize a "Made in Marin" Day at Lagunitas School, to provide the students with locally grown, fresh organic food once a week. With immense support from the community, Made in Marin Day could grow to be an every day event. By pioneering the Marin Food System Project, Lagunitas will be a role model for other Marin Schools to follow.

The students of Novato Charter School are already forming a connection with their garden. Sinclair said that when the students work in the garden, they become attentive and want to learn more. "The kids farm the garden and create it themselves. They take pride in what they are eating," she said. The students acquire a different level of education because they are interacting with their environment.

The positive action generated by these two pilot programs in the Marin County Food System Project could trigger a domino effect throughout all of Marin schools. Schools from around Marin like Novato Charter and Lagunitas have been connecting with their communities to help them understand the imperative need for healthier school food. Obtaining food from local resources

creates a sustainable interdependent web between the schools and the community. The students will have organic yogurt drinks, fresh salads, and sandwiches to eat instead of processed or packaged food. The hope is that students will become healthier, feel better, and be ready to learn.

As we embark on a new school year, we have the chance to provide healthy food in schools and at the same time support our local economy and sustainable agriculture. Now is the time to take advantage of this opportunity. Why not support the health and education of Marin students?

RESOURCES

Interested in changing your school food system? Visit www.eecom.net/msfp/guide.html or call Leah Smith at (415) 663-1338.