

Latest News from the Rhode Island Farm to School Project

By Dorothy Brayley, Executive Director, Kids First

August 2008

We're excited to report to all of you that the 2008 harvest has already experienced Farm to School sales and publicity (*and Farm to Summer Food Service Program sales, too!*) Strawberries from Ferolbink Farms in Tiverton were delivered to North Providence schools by Community Fruitland. You can see a great photo layout by visiting www.communityfruit.com and clicking on Special Events. Local press attended the event and photos appeared in the North Providence *Valley Breeze/Observer*. Ferolbink's strawberries also made their way to Narragansett and South Kingstown schools and some from Quonsett View Farm went to Narragansett too.

Our newest accomplishment was that fresh RI lettuce (first time ever in a school!) went to Central Falls schools, again from Ferolbink Farm, and a story plus photos appeared in the *Pawtucket Times* and the *Providence Journal*. Aramark's Tom Hoagland loved the lettuce and found the price to be good, so wants to explore a possible "growing arrangement" for the 7 districts they manage.

Also, for the first time, fresh RI strawberries were sold to the Summer Food Service Programs in West Warwick and Newport. The strawberries came from Quonsett View Farm. The Summer Food Service Program is another federally supported meals program for low income children, served in parks & recreation sites across the state. Many of them are run by the same Food Service Management Companies who are making local purchases for schools. For the most part, the lunches are bagged and delivered in coolers and by federal regulation, two fruits and/or vegetables **MUST** be served to the children. Therefore, if we can link these programs to single-serve raw fruits and veggies that can be cupped or provided whole, then we can facilitate more sales to that program. Recently we tested sugar snap peas with children in a Providence site and *RI Monthly* was there to take a few photos for the magazine's August edition. (*The publicity is so important as it drives community members and leaders to **DEMAND** Rhode Island grown for their towns' children.*)

This summer, we are building the Farm to School momentum for the Fall. We are arranging tours of farms with Aramark, Sodexo and Chartwells representatives. For Aramark and Sodexo, the distributor is Community Fruitland. For Chartwells, the distributor is Sid Wainer... so we'll work with both to ensure RI-grown gets in the distribution channels to the schools.

And finally, we took all of the suggestions that were brought forth at an April 22nd RI Farm to School meeting and developed a two-year plan for RI Farm to School for 2009-2010. Kids First has written and submitted over one dozen grant applications to get this plan funded. The 2-year plan includes lots more opportunities for classroom education, training and chef demos with food service, communications work, Farm to School bus tours with school personnel and parents, as well continuing to help get RI food service better connected with RI farmers for the development of more long-term "growing relationships", not just purchasing relationships.

So... please give us your input and ideas via e-mail or by telephone. Kimberly Sporkmann from Kids First is providing the Farm to School Project coordination and is available to assist wherever needed. I am also available. You can reach either of us by calling Kids First at 751-4503. You can e-mail Kimberly at kimberlysporkmann@gmail.com or me at: dbrayley@kidsfirstri.org. Contact us! Any ideas or thoughts you have, we'd like to put them in action!