

Winter 2010 Newsletter
Share a Meal in a School Cafeteria

Dear Friends:



It might not be the first thing you think of during the long, cold days of a Rhode Island winter, but fresh Rhode Island grown produce from local farms is still available for schools to serve in their cafeterias. Some of our Rhode Island farmers have set aside acreage just to grow fruits and vegetables for Rhode Island schools! Delicious potatoes, apples and carrots from the 2009 Harvest are all available for purchase through the RI Farm to School program. Please contact our Kids First Farm to School Specialist Kimberly Sporkmann to learn how your school cafeteria can help support the local economy while serving some fresh and yummy Rhode Island Grown produce this winter.

As we enter the second half of the school year, I congratulate schools that have been working hard to implement the new state nutrition criteria and regulations. Cafeterias have been serving more fruits and vegetables (many of them from Rhode Island farms!) more legumes and more whole grains in every single school meal that incorporates RINR (Rhode Island Nutritional Standards). When we send our students to school, we want them to have a positive and successful experience. We want them to have excellent teachers, supportive school staff and a responsive and responsible school environment. As part of that commitment to giving Rhode Island schoolchildren the very best, I urge parents to take some time this year to share a school meal with your child. Meet your student in the cafeteria for lunch one day to see and taste for yourself what is being offered on the menu. All of the Kids First staff and I welcome your comments as we offer assistance to the RINR cafeterias around the state.

In addition to eating a school meal with students, I encourage interested parents to take further steps in encouraging Rhode Island schoolkids to eat healthier. Educate yourself about what exactly RINR means for school meals - our website and the RI Department of Education website are great places to start. Learn about why whole grains are important, learn how fruits and vegetables are important for growth and development and take steps in your own family to encourage a healthier lifestyle through improved nutrition and increased physical activity. To help you, our Kids First Chefs have uploaded some easy, economical and seasonal recipes to try at home. These recipes are based on some of the same suggestions our chefs have given to school cafeteria staff around the state to help promote the nutritional improvements in school meals. Don't be surprised if the "new" meal you serve at home is one that your children have already tried in school!

Finally, I want to remind everyone - parents, cafeteria staff, school staff, even my own Kids First staff, not to despair if kids don't fully embrace every food change at once. As a mom myself, I remember how it takes time to get kids to try something new on their plates. But by setting a good example ourselves and by encouraging tasting and talking about new foods and different menus, we teach our children how food, and meal sharing, can be a wonderful, enjoyable and tasty experience throughout their lives.

Don't forget to eat your winter crop veggies this season!

Dorothy Brayley

Executive Director, Kids First