

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MAY 25, 2016

Harford County Public Schools' Farm to School Program Named "One in a Melon" *Voted Top Farm to School Program in Maryland*

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service recently awarded Harford County Public Schools (HCPS) a "One in a Melon" award for administering an exemplary farm to school program. One school district per state was selected for the award by receiving the most public nominations.

"I applaud our Food and Nutrition Services Department for earning this honor," said Superintendent of Schools Barbara P. Canavan. "The significant amount of time and effort the staff devotes to ensuring our farm to school program is a success is truly worthy of recognition and accolades."

From March 15 through April 15, 2016, parents, teachers, community stakeholders, and students were invited to visit USDA's [Farm to School Census](#) website and nominate their favorite farm to school program to receive the award. According to the Census, 22 Maryland districts have farm to school programs, and a total of 5,254 districts participate across the U.S.

HCPS has been participating in farm to school since 2006. Initially, local farm purchases were primarily apples and peaches. Once the program was in place, it was expanded to include other fruits and vegetables, such as watermelon, honeydew, lettuce, corn, green beans and broccoli, among others. HCPS also works with other programs, like the Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Program (FFVP) offered by the USDA, to introduce a wider variety of produce to elementary students. A cooperative effort with Bel Air High School resulted in a project demonstrating the synergy of fish and plants to grow fresh lettuce and tomatoes. Support for school gardens is part of the program, and the plan is to continue to expand such efforts.

Today, approximately 37,000 children have the opportunity to be exposed to local foods in their school meals and snacks at HCPS every day. In the future, HCPS hopes to expand the program, increasing the portion of local purchases every year.

Farm to school programs help kids form healthy habits, learn where their food comes from, and develop an understanding of the importance of nutrition and agriculture. Results of the 2015 USDA Farm to School Census show that schools with robust farm to school programs report reductions in food waste, higher school meal participation rates, and increased willingness of the students to try new foods, notably fruits and vegetables. Census results also show that U.S. schools invested nearly \$800 million in local food from farmers, ranchers, fishermen, and food processors and manufacturers in the 2013-2014 school year, which is money going directly back into local communities.

-MORE-

PAGE 2: HCPS FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAM NAMED TOP IN THE STATE

School food service staff at HCPS have noticed a number of benefits to participating in farm to school initiatives, including being able to offer much fresher, more nutritious produce to students. Produce is picked closer to the ripening date and offered the next day in the cafeteria, in many cases.

“We have sought to embrace the local agricultural heritage in Harford County and offer that to students as part of the school food service program,” said Gary Childress, HCPS supervisor of Food and Nutrition Services. “This could not have been accomplished without the wonderful cooperation of local farmers and the work of all of our dedicated staff, led by Daren Zeller, assistant supervisor of Food & Nutrition Services. We will continue to look to expand the program, support school gardens and offer the outstanding produce from Harford County farms.”

###