VERMONT FARM TO SCHOOL

A Guide to Taste Testing Local Food in Schools

INSIDE:

- Step-by-step process for conducting classroom or cafeteria taste tests
- Taste test case studies
- Reproducible handouts

Vermont FEED: Food Education Every Day
a partnership of Food Works, Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT), and Shelburne Farms

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Table of Contents

Overview

Purpose of the Guide 1
What is Vermont Food Education Every Day (VT FEED)? 2
Contact Information 3

Getting Started

Why do a Taste Test? 5
Six Steps to Implementing a Taste Test Program in Your School 6
Sample Timeline for Coordinating a School-wide Taste Test 8

Taste Tests in the Cafeteria

Tips for Successful Cafeteria Taste Tests 9
CASE STUDY #1: Sharon Elementary School 10
CASE STUDY #2: Ferrisburgh Central School 12

Taste Tests in the Classroom

Tips for Successful Classroom Taste Tests 16
CASE STUDY #3: Calais Elementary School 17
CASE STUDY #4: Rumney Memorial School 19

Taste Tests in After School Programs

Tips for Successful After-School Taste Tests 22
CASE STUDY #5: "Community Connections," Rumney Memorial School . . 22

Working With and Engaging Others 24

Mechanisms for Purchasing Food Locally 25

Appendices

A. A School Year of Seasonal Recipes 29
B. Fun Seasonal Food Facts 33
C. Surveys for Cafeteria and Classroom Taste Tests 34
D. Sample Classroom Sign-Up Sheet for Monthly Taste Tests 38
E. Sample Letter to Families with Nutritional Information and Recipe . . . 39
F. Sample Classroom Nutrition Lesson 40
G. Taste Tests Do's and Don'ts 42
H. Safety Tips for Cooking 43
I. Bibliography and Other Resources 44

Thank you

Liz Scharf began working with students and taste testing at Rumney School in 2006. For the last two years she has worked as an assistant in the Rumney kitchen, a job that was created in response to the increased student lunch counts and the school's commitment to serving local foods on its menu. She recently completed a 10-month Child Nutrition Program culinary certificate program through the State of Vermont and holds a degree in English from The University of Vermont.

Ann Straka Gilbert co-coordinates the local foods snack program and classroom food education at Rumney School in Middlesex, VT. Her experience as a Parent Education Consultant with the Family Center of Washington County and as Site Coordinator for Community Connections afterschool program adds to her passion of bringing fitness and healthy food to students and their families in a fun and local way. Ann holds a BA in Humanistic Studies and lives in central Vermont with her husband and her 2 kitchen-competent teenage daughters.

Case Study Schools

Thanks to the following schools who have dedicated their classrooms and cafeterias to supporting healthy food choices in their students, and for giving generously of their time to help develop this guide.

Sharon Elementary School
75 Vermont Route 132
Sharon, VT 05065-6685
(802) 763-7425
PRINCIPAL: Barrett Williams
CONTACTS: Lin Ann Perry (School Cook), Keenan Haley, Meg Hopkins (Teachers)

Calais Elementary School
321 Lightning Ridge Rd
Plainfield, VT 05667-9318
(802) 454-7777
PRINCIPAL: Grace Hoffman, ghoffman@u32.org
CONTACT: Laura Fillbach (paraprofessional and Nutrition Coordinator), lfillbach@u32.org

Ferrisburgh Central School
56 Little Chicago Road
Ferrisburgh, VT 05456
Phone: (802) 877-3463
PRINCIPAL: JoAnn Taft-Blakely, jtaftblakely@anwsu.org or jtaft-blakely@anwsu.org
CONTACTS: Kathy Alexander, kalexander@anwsu.org

Rumney Memorial School
433 Shady Rill Road
Middlesex, VT 05602
(802) 223-5429
PRINCIPAL: Adam Rosen, arosen@rumney.org
CONTACTS: Liz Scharf, Ann Gilbert

FEED Staff: Abbie Nelson, Dana Hudson, Erica Curry, Amy Chambers, and Elizabeth Zipern.

Purpose of the Guide

Encouraging children to enjoy nutritious foods from an early age is a vital step to a lifetime of making healthy choices. Working within school food systems is a great place to start. All across the country a revolution in child nutrition is taking place. Schools are launching efforts to seek out, prepare, and serve more nutritious food. In growing numbers, they are establishing Farm to School Programs to boost student consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, purchase products grown by local farmers, and connect schools to the farmers in their communities. It is no accident that our nation's First Lady has picked up this standard: supporting children in making healthier food choices through access to fresh local foods and community gardens. But with all these changes, come challenges.

Persuading youth to eat nutritious food is not always an easy task, especially when you consider the money that food companies spend to advertise less-than-healthy food products, or when you observe the items on restaurant kids' menus—pizza, chicken fingers, and french fries. How can a fresh local carrot, hearty chili, or fresh fruit compete? Well, they *can* compete—with a little help. Although children are influenced by the media and drawn to familiar fare, they like fresh fruits and vegetables, too. And it may surprise some parents to know that children like vegetables raw, sautéed, steamed and roasted.

Most school food service personnel know, however, that if they introduce a radically new dish or food item, it will end up in the compost or trash. So how do schools encourage students to try new foods on the menu? That's where taste testing comes in. Vermont Food Education Every Day (VT FEED) has found that by connecting the three C's (Classroom, Cafeteria, and Community), taste testing can help students change their food choices. If students learn where the food comes from, how it is grown, have hands-on experiences with it, and use their senses to understand it, they are more likely to taste and accept it.

3 C's Approach to Food in Vermont Schools

VT FEED was designed to help school-age children make informed food choices, improve their diets, and recognize the role local farms play in communities. VT FEED does this by focusing on the three C's: Classroom, Cafeteria, and Community.

Classroom – providing standards-based farm, food, and nutrition curriculum and professional development for teachers

Cafeteria – incorporating local and seasonal produce as well as professional development for school food personnel.

Community – developing community forums and committees of farmers, partners and other community members.

Together the three C's support healthy children, healthy agriculture and healthy communities.

This guide will give you the tools and resources to help implement a taste testing program in your school in order to:

- Broaden student experiences with a variety of foods
- Introduce foods that are locally grown and available
- Integrate into school meals new, local foods that students will accept
- Involve students and staff in school food change

In this guide is a small sampling of school taste test case studies that represent what is happening all over Vermont to introduce new flavors in the cafeteria and classroom. These schools have created healthier food environments by encouraging children to try new and different foods, many of which are grown and produced locally. Your school can do it, too!

What is VT FEED?

VT FEED (Vermont Food Education Every Day) works with schools and communities to raise awareness about healthy food, the role of Vermont farms and farmers, and good nutrition. VT FEED acts as a catalyst for rebuilding healthy food systems, and cultivates links between the classrooms, cafeterias, local farms, and communities.

Goals of VT FEED:

- engage communities in active support of their local school and community food system.
- work to increase student and teacher knowledge of food, farms and nutrition by developing and testing replicable curriculum that meets the Vermont Framework for Standards and Learning.
- strive to increase direct marketing opportunities for locally produced foods and improve the eating patterns of school-aged children by developing local purchasing contracts with schools and offering professional development to school food personnel.

Contact Information

VT FEED is a partnership of Food Works, The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT), and Shelburne Farms.

To contact VT FEED: 802-434-4122 • Website: www.vtfeed.org

FOOD WORKS AT TWO RIVERS CENTER

64 Main Street • Montpelier, VT 05601
(802) 223-1515 • www.tworiverscenter.org

Food Works was founded in 1988 to address the crisis of childhood hunger in Vermont. The initial aim was to provide teachers and students with prevention-based skills and knowledge of food through school gardening and nutrition education. Over the years, we have found students hungry for real connection to nature and their local community and have since developed ecological literacy and cultural literacy programs.

NOFA-VT

Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont
PO Box 697 • Richmond, VT 05477
(802) 434-4122 • www.nofavt.org

NOFA-VT was founded in 1971, and is an organization of farmers, gardeners, and consumers working to promote an economically viable and ecologically sound Vermont food system for the benefit of current and future generations.

SHELBURNE FARMS

1611 Harbor Road • Shelburne, VT 05482
(802) 985-8686 • www.shelburnefarms.org

Shelburne Farms is a membership-supported, nonprofit environmental education center, 1,400-acre working farm, and National Historic Landmark in Shelburne, Vermont. The farm serves as an educational resource by practicing a rural land use that is environmentally, economically and culturally sustainable. Its mission is to cultivate a conservation ethic.

Getting Started

Why do a Taste Test?

It's true that children are predictable eaters—they're predictable in their unpredictability! Their taste preferences change and mature over time, and as many school cooks know, an item on the lunch tray that is devoured one month, might be completely ignored the next. Children can be picky eaters, and we can't count on them to like everything we offer. In fact, a child may have to try a new food up to ten times before he or she accepts it. Most children will want to try a bite of something before they commit to an entire serving. First-time taste testing is a great way to introduce children to new foods in a fun, pressure-free format.

What is a Taste Test?

A taste test is a small sample of food offered either in the classroom, or in the cafeteria at lunchtime, introducing its flavor, texture and smell. The item might be a dollop of fresh salsa with a handful of corn chips, a small 2-oz. serving of roasted root vegetables, or a mini whole wheat carrot-maple muffin. After the sample has been offered, children (and adults) vote on whether they tried it, liked it, and would be willing to try it again.

Taste testing is also an invaluable tool for a food service program looking to make healthy changes to its menus at minimum cost. No one, especially food service personnel who are concerned about budgets, lunch sales, and wasted food, wants to see students throw good food away. By familiarizing children with new foods, taste tests can help ensure that an item is marketable before it's offered on the menu. Best of all, students experience new flavors with their peers, have a hand in preparing the food (ideally), and both the school and students can proudly say, "We are a school that tries new foods!"

Students at Rumney School in Middlesex gather together to try a sample of roasted root vegetables. Students who see their peers enjoying the food are more likely to try it themselves. ***(photo courtesy of Rumney Memorial School)***

6 Steps to Implementing a Taste Test Program in Your School

1 **Know your goals.** Before doing a taste test, establish a few goals that are easy to communicate. Are you implementing a taste test program to expand children's food choices? Encourage more healthy snack or lunch choices brought from home? Do you want to broaden the school lunch or breakfast menu? Do you want to introduce local foods?

An interested parent at Rumney school invited teachers, a local farmer and the school's food service manager to attend a local Farm to School workshop in 2007. These folks became regular supporters of the school-wide taste testing program that exists today. A diverse team will help ensure that your program has the support it needs to take off and remain sustainable. ***(photo courtesy of Rumney Memorial School)***

2 **Develop a food committee.** Meet with the food service director or head cook to discuss possibilities and then with the school principal to discuss your goals and to make a plan. Find parents and teachers who are supportive of the idea of a taste testing program. Your best allies are the people who work with the students every day. Most teachers will support a program, but be careful about adding to their workloads. If your focus is on local food, find an area farmer who can supply produce to your school and who would be willing to speak to a class or possibly come for part of a taste test. Meet with food service personnel to communicate your ideas and to discuss ways to use local foods in the school menu. Think about the VT FEED "3 C's" model: representatives from each of the C's should be part of your team. Your committee, together with food service personnel, can decide how often taste tests should occur, what format (in the cafeteria or classrooms), what foods to try, and how to fund the foods being tested (PTO's make great partners). They can also help analyze taste test results.

3 **Start small and think through the details.** With the committee, decide what food you first want to feature. Where will you get it? (Perhaps your school wants to build a relationship with a nearby farm where you know you can get local potatoes.) What recipe will you try? (roasted potatoes, maybe?) How much will the ingredients cost? (Will the farmer donate potatoes just for tasting? Is the school food service willing to spend extra money?) Does the kitchen have the staff and equipment to prepare the food? How will the food be ordered? Who will prepare it? If

the students like the new food, is the recipe repeatable on the lunch or breakfast line? Be sure to meet and talk through all these questions with the school food service director and cooking staff. *For ideas on what foods and recipes have been used in taste tests, see "A School Year of Seasonal Recipes," Appendix A, p.29, VT FEED Guide for Using Local Foods in Schools, or the resources in Appendix I, p.44.*

4 Be respectful of food service personnel and teachers. Food service personnel have a tough job, take pride in what they cook, and are busy. Teachers and other school personnel have a lot of time demands, too. Everyone has the same goal—to feed our children the freshest healthiest food possible, but we may have different ideas on how to get there.

5 Offer hands-on experiences. Children learn best when they are actively involved and using their hands. Children who help prepare food for a taste test are more likely to try it, and like it than children who have not been involved. If at all possible, include monthly hands-on lessons in the classroom or cafeteria so students have the chance to participate in making the food. *See sample VT FEED curriculum units on the website for ideas on how to integrate taste testing foods into curriculum.*

6 Just do it! Meet with teachers and food service staff to find a date that works for a taste test. Invite parents to help, either in your weekly newsletter or through a special invitation. If you are considering a classroom taste test program, find a time each week or month that fits well into the class schedule. (Snack time is usually a good time.) Encourage teachers and staff to be a part of the taste tests, integrate the information into their curriculum (if possible), and help model healthy eating behaviors. If you plan to conduct cafeteria taste tests during lunchtime, encourage staff members to be involved in the testing, or sample along with the students. By getting the whole school involved, you are more likely to have a successful program. Once you have had one or two successful taste tests, invite your local political figures and the local paper to see for themselves that your school is making some school food changes. *See "Taste Test Do's and Don'ts," Appendix G, p.42 and VT FEED Guide for Using Local Food in Schools for a press release example.*

High school students reflect back on taste tests...

"I really enjoyed the taste test we did! It was an interactive, simple way to decide between two different versions of salad we made. I'm sure that if kids could choose their own meals and snacks by having a taste test there wouldn't be any problems with encouraging them to eat school meals. — Schuyler Cowan, 11th grade

"The activity was engaging because it was hands-on and we were able to make our own choices throughout the process of making the salad.
— Mae Kemsley, 10th grade

Using individual trays or small paper cups—like for the roasted root vegetables below—makes a taste test more aesthetically pleasing and encourages children to try a food that otherwise might go untouched on a school lunch tray. *(photo courtesy of Ferrisburgh Central School)*

Sample Timeline for Coordinating a School-wide Taste Test

2-3 WEEKS PRIOR TO THE TASTE TEST:

- At the food committee meeting with food service personnel, decide what food will be tested. Make sure foods chosen fit into the school food program and align with your committee goals. *(See VT FEED Guide for Using Local Food in Schools, and Appendices A & I, p.29 & 44 for recipe ideas.)*
- Find a class(es) that is willing to prepare the food in the kitchen or classroom the morning of the taste test and that will help serve and survey.
- Find parents/volunteers who will help serve and clean up.
- Prepare an announcement of the taste test for the school newsletter or school-wide email
- Research and share nutritional information about the food, and have the recipe ready to send home to students' families. *(See "Sample Letter to Families," Appendix E, p.39.)*
- If purchasing from a farmer, contact him/her to be sure product will be available when you need it.

ONE WEEK PRIOR:

- Check with food service and classrooms involved to make sure everyone is prepared.
- Make sure necessary food items have been purchased or are being delivered on the date needed.
- Prepare a taste testing survey. *(See Appendix C, p.34 for examples.)*
- Advertise the taste test: school newsletter, school website, all-staff email, invite local paper!

DAY OF:

- Announce the taste test during announcements, classroom meetings, and with signs in the lobby
- Help food service set up for hosting students in the kitchen.
- Have the food service explain about food safety when preparing foods. Make time for everyone to wash their hands and put on hairnets or hats.
- If preparing in the kitchen, small groups of 4–5 students work best. If preparing in the cafeteria or classroom, divide the preparation tasks into small groups.
- Remind children to respect the workspace and workers.
- Rotate groups from classroom to kitchen, if necessary.
- Set up taste testing table before lunch periods begin.
- Take pictures and notes to report in your newsletter.

DAY AFTER:

- Send a letter home to parents describing the taste test, the food their child tasted, and the recipe to try at home. *(See "Sample Letter to Families," Appendix E, p.39.)*
- Have a classroom tally the results of the taste test and post them on a bulletin board or in the school newsletter.

Taste Tests in the Cafeteria

The objectives of a cafeteria taste test are to involve students, teachers, parents, community members and food service in introducing new foods to students and to build the relationship between food service personnel and the rest of the school community. As students become familiar with taste tests, they will be more open to trying new foods. Regular taste tests can become an exciting school-wide event.

Choose foods to taste test that:

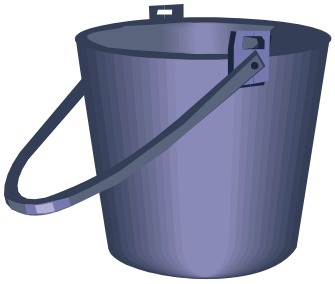
- ☑ increase consumption of whole grains, fruits and vegetables
- ☑ can be featured on the menu as a regular breakfast or lunch item
- ☑ will meet school food program requirements for nutrition, presentation, and cost.

Tips for Successful Cafeteria Taste Tests

- Always start with the food service personnel to plan a taste test. They can decide with you what foods to try.
- Partner with the PTO or a local business to help raise money for the food and for a taste test coordinator to work a few hours a month.
- Start with regular monthly taste tests of simple, affordable food (so it's easy to repeat if students like it).
- Find parents or community volunteers who can coordinate the classrooms with cafeteria activities. Food service personnel are unlikely to have the time to do this, although they can participate in some parts.
- Use local produce when possible and invite your local farmer or processor to join your taste test.
- If possible, work with teachers and food service personnel to have a small group of students help prepare the food. Remember, "If they make it, they will eat it."
- Offer small servings in a positive, non-coersive atmosphere.
- Advertise taste tests in the school newsletter or in letters home to families.
- Announce the results to the whole school after the taste test has finished and what the next steps are for that new food.
- Openly appreciate efforts made, and celebrate successes and lessons learned.

Taste Test Reminders!

- ☑ Wash hands well!
- ☑ Teach proper equipment use & care
- ☑ Dont forget to clean up!



Composting Rots!

Encourage children who can't finish their samples to compost the rest.

At their monthly cafeteria taste test, Sharon Elementary students line up to try toppings for salads made with locally grown greens. *(photo courtesy of Sharon Elementary School)*

CASE STUDY 1: Sharon Elementary School

Sharon, Vermont • Enrollment: 88 students, K-6

Sharon Elementary School has been conducting monthly cafeteria taste tests since 2005. They call these "Rozo's Days," in memory of Rozo McLaughlin, the state representative from nearby South Royalton who passed away shortly after she helped pass the Farm to School Bill in the Vermont Legislature in 2006.

WHY THEY DO IT

As part of their Wellness Policy Initiatives and their efforts to incorporate food, farm, and nutrition education into their curriculum, the school wanted to broaden the school lunch menu and help children make healthier choices at home and outside of school. Taste tests were introduced so that students could try different foods prepared in a variety of ways and to introduce local foods into the menu.

In 2009, Sharon Elementary School's Food Service Director, LinAnn Perry (above), completed a 10-month, State of Vermont Child Nutrition Culinary Certificate program that encourages schools to participate in Farm to School endeavors. LinAnn is thrilled to be working with a school that has been part of the local foods movement for a number of years. *(photo courtesy of Sharon Elementary School)*

HOW THEY DO IT

At the beginning of each school year, teachers choose a month when their class will conduct one cafeteria taste test for the entire school. *(See "Sample Classroom Sign-up Sheet," Appendix D, p.38.)* With the assistance of the food service director, the students and teacher choose a featured food and recipe and set a date for the test. The class reviews the recipe, determines who will be responsible for getting the ingredients (with a focus on "as local as possible") and makes sure the ingredients are available before the day of the tasting. On taste test day, the classroom preparing the food meets and assigns jobs. **Tasks include:**

- Prep vegetables and fruits
- Measure ingredients used in the recipe
- Cook the recipe with the help of the school food service director
- Make signs and posters announcing the taste test and featured food
- Design posters advertising the health benefits of the food being served
- Serve the sample during lunch
- Tally results of the test: Did students try it? Did they like it? Would they try it again? *See Appendix C for sample cafeteria taste test surveys*

SUCCESSES

- Students are experiencing new tastes and more students are willing to try new foods.
- Students routinely talk about healthy food choices.
- The school has planted a production garden (it includes larger plantings of selected vegetables such as cherry tomatoes and winter squash) to help support the taste testing and cafeteria food needs.
- New recipes approved by the students are often tried again on the monthly lunch menu.
- The school lunch program has added a salad bar featuring fresh vegetables and fruits.
- The school received a Farm-to-School grant in 2008 to support and expand their farm to school program.

What Sharon Elementary School students say...

ABOUT PREPARING THE FOOD:
"It's kinda like, when you're preparing you're nervous because we're giving it to other people to try—like the first and second graders" — Tyler, age 8

ABOUT WHY THEY LIKE TASTE TESTS:
"Because you get to try new foods and you might have them for lunch"
— Kyle, age 8

ABOUT THEIR FAVORITE TESTS:
"Potato Bar! We cut the potato in half, took stuff out and topped it with stuff!"
— Sam, age 8

CHALLENGES

- Not all foods that the students want to "try again" are offered on the menu, and if they are, they aren't always enjoyed as they were in the taste test. (Taking free food as part of a taste test is different than taking the risk of buying a food tried only once).
- The school food service director would like to try new items with local foods but finds that time-consuming recipes requiring processing fresh ingredients are difficult to produce on a regular basis.
- Teachers, administrators, and food service personnel don't always agree on the best process for taste testing or the ultimate goal of getting the new food on the lunch menu.

Sharon Elementary student helps prepare a vegetable casserole made with the school garden's zucchini and local corn and cheese for a cafeteria taste test. *(photo courtesy of Sharon Elementary School)*

ACTION PLAN

- Sharon Elementary Food Service Director, LinAnn Perry, recognizes that each recipe needs to be standardized and tried more than once so that anyone can make it, and it will taste the same every time.
- The school received a mini-grant for a food processor that will eliminate the job of hand chopping and slicing vegetables.
- Teachers are working on communicating more effectively with the food service director about new food ideas and understanding the challenges that she faces with menu changes.

CASE STUDY 2: Ferrisburgh Central School

Ferrisburgh, Vermont • Enrollment: 205 students, K-6

The food service personnel at the Ferrisburgh Central School have been offering "Try-its" to the students since 2001. These are an opportunity to taste something new: a new food to be introduced on the school lunch menu, a vegetable grown in the school garden, a fun tropical fruit, or a food that is related to a classroom study.

WHY THEY DO IT

The objective is to offer students a chance to learn about and be exposed to new foods, local foods, a variety of flavors, and healthy food preparations. The Ferrisburgh philosophy is to make food fun and easy—not to force "Try-its" or make a big deal out of a new food.

A Ferrisburgh Central School student masters chop sticks while enjoying freshly made soba noodles during a recent International Day. ***(photo courtesy of Ferrisburgh Central School)***

HOW THEY DO IT

"Try-its" are offered frequently in the school cafeteria and initiated by Food Service Director Kathy Alexander and cafeteria personnel in several ways. A small portion of a new item is offered in the lunch line for students to examine and choose whether or not to try it. Teachers also deliver samples to lunchroom tables where students may see others already eating them. It is announced that those bringing their lunch from home may try the samples as well. This tasting strategy is therefore not as "scary" to students as buying a whole lunch of an unfamiliar item that they may not like. Each encounter exposes the student to the name, smell, and sight of the item. If they choose to try it, they experience the taste as well. Also, every two months, an International Day is worked into the lunch menu, which allows new foods from other countries to be tasted.

Classrooms allow time for "Try-its" too. Sometimes a unit of study will include a food education aspect. A vegetable is brought from the cafeteria to the classroom where students get to examine it, cut it open, see the seeds, talk about how and where it is grown, its nutritional value, and how to prepare it. It is then taken back to the kitchen to be cooked and served to the class, and they get to taste it and vote on whether or not they liked it and would eat it again.

A morning snack cart circulates to classrooms daily and often offers samples that feature a new, local, or even leftover food. Students can purchase a "Try-it"-size portion for 25 or 50 cents as a mid-morning snack.

The school hosts two short-term college dietetics interns each year, who choose a food to introduce to the school community as one of their academic competencies. He or she researches and displays the food's nutritional value, students learn about and taste the new food, and a recipe is developed incorporating the new food into the school lunch menu. The arrangement is win-win for both the school and the dietetics student.

A fall Harvest Dinner is a time for the school and community to celebrate, appreciate, and enjoy the harvest from the school gardens. The cafeteria invites teachers, students, farmers and families who have helped plant, weed, and harvest to enjoy an evening meal of locally grown food. It's a natural and fun end to the months of work of growing the food.

SUCCESSES

- Students are familiar with the exercise of "Try-its" and know they have a choice .
- Student participation in the school lunch program has grown from 50% to 80% of the student population.

What Ferrisburgh Central School students say...

ABOUT TRY-ITS: *(the good & the not so good!)*
"I got a Try-it of a green sauce mixed with noodles. I forget the name, oh yeah, it's called Pesto! Now I eat that whenever I can. I loved it."

"I've had a Try-it of that squash before. I didn't like it. I'm not ready to try it again."

ABOUT THE CAFETERIA:
"Our cafeteria has the best food of any school. We get Try-its of new things so we see if we like them. I tried this chicken and biscuits (with garden-fresh celeriac, carrots, parsnips, and peas) and now I order it because it is so good!"

At lunch in the cafeteria, the cook took 5 minutes at the microphone to introduce celeriac from the school garden. Students saw it whole and peeled, and were challenged to find it in their chicken and biscuit stew (above). ***(photo courtesy of Ferrisburgh Central School)***

Kathy Alexander

What the food service director says...

"We want to keep things fresh—not stale! So it is important to have Try-its to introduce a new food, maybe one from our garden like swiss chard or kale, or a new way of preparing something."

"It is essential to realize that not only are we feeding the children, we are educating them. Try-its expose them to new foods. Even if they don't like the taste, they have had multiple opportunities to see it, hear about it, and decide to agree to or decline a taste."

"You have to avoid saying, 'Children won't eat that, or children don't like it.' It just isn't true. Tasting Try-its and providing feedback give the students ownership and allows them to make an investment."

- In 2009, the 23 raised garden beds and 30' x 30' plot yielded nearly 300 pounds of squash, 200 pounds of tomatoes, 100 pounds of carrots, 30 pounds of beets and leeks, and plenty of green peppers, potatoes, and basil.
- Classroom teachers now help their classes contribute to the food in the school: All classes plant seeds and harvest vegetables from the school garden; kindergartners learn to make dough and bake bread; first graders harvest, thresh, and sort black beans; third graders prepare whole wheat rolls for the cafeteria every two weeks; fifth graders pick and wash the basil for the school's pesto supply; sixth graders cut up potatoes for the Holiday meal for 300 people.
- Students, parents, teachers, administrative staff, and the school board all promote "Try-its," the garden, and the cafeteria food program.

Other Signs of Success:

- **The walk-in freezer is stocked with school-grown vegetables including tomato sauce, grated zucchini for muffins, pureed squash, and basil.**
- **Students sometimes email the cafeteria staff asking for specific recipes—"Please!"**

CHALLENGES

- Preparing fresh food and the sample "Try-its" takes a great deal of time and energy.
- It is sometimes difficult to come up with new ways of preparing foods.
- Getting local farmers to deliver food is more work than ordering from the commercial food distributor who arrives every Monday morning with his laptop to place the order.
- It can be a challenge to stay committed and to think of the big picture (i.e., what time-consuming foods need to be prepped now, for a meal in a day or two?).
- There is a lot of school support, but no official food committee working on the taste testing program with the food service director.
- The bounty from the garden has to be processed and frozen during the summer by the food service director, and hopefully, some volunteers.

ACTION PLAN

- Food service staff will supply a quart of pureed pumpkin to each class, and each class will decide on a recipe to prepare in their classroom. The cafeteria staff will help with cooking.
- A second 30′ x 30′ foot garden plot is being added to plant raspberries for school meals.
- 3 volunteer work days are scheduled for spring, summer, and fall maintenance to keep up the school gardens in order to ensure a plentiful crop the following year.
- The cafeteria staff is brainstorming ways to improve their new snack cart program. They would like to include more sample "Try-its".

A Ferrisburgh Central School student displays a crate of fresh picked tomatoes. Students who help plant, harvest and prepare food for eating are more likely to taste the fruits of their labor. ***(photo courtesy of Ferrisburgh Central School)***

This photo shows an easy way to survey students after they try a new food or recipe. ***(photo courtesy of Ferrisburgh Central School)***

Taste Tests in the Classroom

Some teachers and food service directors have successfully introduced new foods in the classroom in short, informal sessions. Working with food service is ideal so that classroom-tested food can then be featured on the school menus. The classroom also offers an opportunity to integrate taste tests into the curriculum. Begin by talking with the teacher to find out the best way to make the taste test an educational opportunity. The key is to keep it simple: roasted slices of delicata squash, different types of lettuce, or a sampling of locally grown apples can be part of a dynamic taste testing lesson. If students are involved in preparing the food to be tested, they will be more likely to eat it. Adding "fun food facts" can also familiarize students with a new food and help them accept it. *(See "Fun Seasonal Food Facts," Appendix B, p.33; "Sample Nutrition Lesson," Appendix F, p.40; the VT FEED Curriculum Units, www.vtfeed.org)*

Ben Gleason from Gleason Grains, whose whole wheat flour is used in the school kitchen, is invited to speak in a Ferrisburgh Central School classroom. Connecting Community to Classrooms is a VT FEED fundamental. ***(photo courtesy of Ferrisburgh Central School)***

Tips for Successful Classroom Taste Tests

- When using local foods, show where it is grown on a state or county map. (Compare it to bananas grown in South America!)
- Tie the taste test to other subjects, like math. For example, show students a parsnip, have them estimate is weight, then have them weight it. Ask younger children to guess the color of a vegetable after it is peeled.
- Invite food service staff to a classroom taste test to introduce a new food and make more school-wide connections.
- Try foods that are (or could be) served in the school food program.
- Invite a farmer to bring his or her local food and discuss how it is grown or made.
- To help keep down costs, ask parents to provide some of the foods, or ask parents and community volunteers to help organize taste testing.
- Be sure to communicate regularly with parents about what their children are trying—they won't believe it!
- To increase the consumption of vegetables, invite classes to experiment with recipes and create names for new dressings and dips, for example.
- Keep the school food service aware and involved in your classroom taste tests—they might be able to provide some of the raw ingredients and feature the foods in their breakfasts or lunches.

CASE STUDY 3: Calais Elementary School

Calais, Vermont • Enrollment: 123 students, K-6

Since 2005, the Nutrition Committee at Calais has been using classroom taste tests to promote healthy food choices outside the cafeteria. Recently made into a part-time paid position, the Nutrition Educator coordinates and prepares monthly plans, develops recipes, and trains parent volunteers to conduct these taste tests.

A parent volunteer asks a question to enthusiastic students at Calais Elementary School. Note the snack cart being used in the back of the room. ***(photo courtesy of Calais Elementary School)***

WHY THEY DO IT

Establishing a taste testing program at Calais was one of the goals of the Nutrition Committee, which meets once a month. In an effort to teach students about healthy food choices, the nutrition committee agreed that having a presence, in each classroom every month, was essential to encourage students to try new foods, learn about them, and have recipes to take home. This also helps familiarize students with new items that could be added to the lunch menu.

HOW THEY DO IT

The Nutrition Education Coordinator keeps a binder listing what fresh local produce will be available each month. This helps her decide what foods to introduce, and allows the food service director to choose what seasonal food she might like to make and serve in the cafeteria. "Taste Test Day" is scheduled early in the month so that students have an opportunity to try a food before it is offered on the menu later in the month.

The taste test program follows the model of the school's Science and Environmental Education program. Each month the coordinator meets with parent volunteers to train them on how to prepare the recipe and present the food to students. She has already prepared the finished dish and shares this with the group so they can see what it looks like and taste it together. *(See "Sample Classroom Nutrition Lesson," Appendix F, p.33.)*

The school snack cart is stocked with basic ingredients that volunteers can use to prepare the dish at home. Volunteers (ideally two parents) bring the dish to their

Snack Carts

Snack Carts are just rolling carts with a flat top, a shelf or two, and a cabinet below. Simple cooking and prepping utensils are stored on it as well as some basic ingredients such as flour, sugar, salt, etc. The cart can be rolled to any class to help that class prepare its own taste test or do classroom food education.

A monthly classroom taste test at Calais Elementary School. *(photo courtesy of Calais Elementary School)*

assigned class on the scheduled Taste Test day, explain the lesson, and distribute all the sample-size portions during class snack time. When directed, all students taste it at once, using their senses to discuss flavors, textures, smells, and recognizable ingredients. Finally, students take a survey of whether or not they liked it.

A letter with nutrition information and Recipe of the Month is sent home with students. The featured food appears on the school lunch menu later in the month. *(See "Sample Letter to Families," Appendix E, p.29.)*

Invite Families to Lunch

In the school newsletter or letter home:
"Watch the Lunch Menu featuring the Recipe of the Month!
You are welcome to join your child for lunch at school."

SUCCESSES

- Students enjoy a fun classroom lesson and trying new foods.
- Families are involved, often make the recipes at home to enjoy again, and are alerted to watch for the cafeteria menus featuring these recipes.
- Parents are invited to eat lunch at school to try the new recipe.

CHALLENGES

- Introducing complicated or difficult-to-prepare foods can be challenging to the food service, especially when they have 3 or 4 additional items on the menu.
- It is difficult to recruit enough volunteers who can both come to information meetings and present monthly lessons in the classroom.
- There is a definite lack of consistency in the finished product because not all volunteers prepare a recipe the same way (e.g., whole wheat flour vs. white; diced vegetables vs. cubed).

Featured Tastings

at Calais Elementary School

- Corn Chowder
- Winter Vegetable Pot Pie
- Sweet Potato Fries
- Corn Pie
- Butternut Squash Soup

ACTION PLAN

- The Calais Nutrition Educator will communicate with the food service director to come up with workable plans to try new foods in the cafeteria.
- Items tested in the classroom will be offered on the lunch menu at least twice during the school year.
- Nutrition committee volunteers plan to teach mini-cooking classes in the classroom during students' Academic Choice time.

- A volunteer recruitment letter is being sent home to parents both to create a pool of available volunteers and to familiarize families with the program.
- Plans are underway to test more recipes.
- The school is researching a grant to purchase a commercial food processor to help with labor intensive preparation of fresh produce.
- Investigate the idea of a "summer boot camp" for school food service personnel to standardize recipes and share successes.

Encourage students to eat more...

☑ **VEGGIES:** Calais Elementary School classrooms will taste and vote for their favorite vegetable toppings for Veggie Pizza.

☑ **LEAFY GREENS:** Celebrate St. Patrick's Day with a greens Taste Test! *(See Appendix C, p.36)*

CASE STUDY 4: Rumney Memorial School

Middlesex, Vermont • Enrollment 140, K-6

A Rumney 2nd grader peels a golden beet to reveal a stunning yellow inside. Students who get their hands on vegetables are more likely to try them. ***(photo courtesy of Rumney Memorial School)***

Rumney Memorial School has been offering free weekly healthy snacks to all students since 2005. When it needed money to continue the healthy snack program, a group of parents applied for one of the first Vermont Farm to School grants, which they received in January 2007. With the grant, the healthy snack program took off, and began incorporating local foods and classroom taste tests. Today, Rumney continues the tradition of a weekly snack using primarily locally grown and seasonal produce. Older students have come to know Fridays as "Healthy Snack Day" and younger ones accept the snack as a normal Friday classroom ritual. "What's for Healthy snack?" is a question that buzzes throughout the halls each Friday morning.

WHY THEY DO IT

The school's nutrition committee, formed in 2004, began working with VT FEED to determine ways that local foods could be used in the school

A first grade student at Rumney enjoys counting the chicken eggs at a field trip to a nearby farm. Knowing that eggs come in a variety of colors and shapes, not just clean in a carton, helps students make a closer connection to their food. ***(photo courtesy of Rumney Memorial School)***

lunch menu. As a result, encouraging students to try new foods and incorporating local healthy foods into every meal are now goals of the Rumney Food Service Program.

HOW THEY DO IT

To celebrate the successes of the Farm to School grant, Rumney hosted its first annual Community Fall Harvest Dinner in 2007. Now in its third year, the dinner raises enough funds to purchase local food for the snack program, pay a snack coordinator to prepare the school snack four hours a week, and contribute to the local Middlesex Food Shelf. By including the food shelf, the school reaches a broader audience for its dinners while supporting a community program.

Every week the paid snack coordinator and the food service kitchen assistant plan the weekly snack, based on the food available from local farmers. On Friday mornings they prepare snack-sized portions of the food and present them to the classrooms. In grades K-4, children spend 10 minutes talking about the food, guessing its ingredients, discussing textures and smells, making connections with their own family foods, and trying the food together. After the snack has been tested, students vote on whether they tried it, liked it, and would try it again or buy it for lunch. In grades 5 and 6, students eat their snacks during academic time and do not conduct surveys. Once a food has been tried a number of times, it is offered on the school lunch or breakfast menu. Successful foods include: roasted root vegetables, roasted delicata squash smiles, edamame beans, corn on the cob, granola parfaits with fresh local fruit, and apple-cheese quesadillas.

SUCCESSES

- Because the food service program fully supports classroom taste testing, Rumney has dramatically changed its breakfast and lunch menu to include foods from the taste tests, and more locally grown vegetables and locally raised beef.
- Due to higher lunch counts based on menu enhancements and meal value, the school board approved a kitchen assistant position to help process local foods and to assist with the weekly snack program.
- The weekly snack program has become a regular part of the Friday curriculum. Teachers set aside time to conduct taste tests and enjoy the snack as a group with lively discussions and questions about the food.

- Because of changes they have seen in students' eating habits, Rumney's first and second grade teachers have developed a unit around the connections between food and the environment so that students can have a better understanding of where their food comes from. This has included several field trips to local farms.

Don't let samples go to waste!

If you have extra food left over from classroom taste tests, serve the samples to staff, or in the cafeteria at lunch.

CHALLENGES

- When taste tests first started, two classrooms helped prepare the snack each week. Due to the time demands of other academic requirements, this no longer happens.
- Food that is accepted once in classroom taste tests is often refused in the lunch line or thrown untouched into the compost, especially by the younger students.
- Based on lunch counts, students still prefer processed chicken nuggets and oven baked fries over fresh chicken fillet sandwiches and roasted local potatoes.
- A school garden was planted in 2007, but has had difficulty taking off. Few parents are interested in keeping it going (growing!) during the summer.

To prepare large amounts of fresh vegetables, a commercial food processor is a must. A mini-grant or donations from the school PTO can help defer the cost.

ACTION PLAN

- The healthy snack staff is working with teachers in the primary grades to determine how students can become more involved in snack preparation without compromising academic time.
- Food service staff now offers "no thank you bites" to students who refuse to try a new menu item. By circulating around the cafeteria at lunch, they can encourage students to try the sample-sized item.
- Rather than doing away with processed chicken altogether, Rumney now offers healthier versions of sides. For example, a processed chicken patty is served on a 100% whole wheat roll with a side of roasted root vegetables, a Rumney favorite. Along with hot dogs and regular fries, a veggie dog and sweet potato fries are offered.
- After several Rumney teachers expressed interest in the garden, the snack staff is now working with a classroom teacher to determine how the school can keep the garden alive. Volunteer efforts to build a fence around the garden to ward off deer are in the works.

Taste Tests in After-School Programs

Taste testing new foods in an out-of-school-time program gives a foot in the door to what is not yet accepted as school-wide practice. Such taste tests can introduce healthy local foods without the school food program, teachers, or administration needing to approve a new project. Because after-school taste tests usually involve hands-on food education, with students chopping, grating, and mixing ingredients, they are also a fun activity. They can engage small, multi-age groups of students who need an interesting enrichment exercise as well as a filling and nutritious snack.

Tips for Successful After-School Program Taste Tests

- Form small groups of multi-age students, making sure each student has an age-appropriate job.
- Invite an interested parent or teacher to lead a cooking class. Incorporate school garden produce when possible.
- Show proper use of kitchen tools every time to ensure safe behavior.
- Choose simple recipes that require a short cooking time. You may only have an hour or less to prep, cook, serve and tally results.
- Offer samples to parents when they pick their students up. This will engage families and familiarize them with the program.

Students in Rumney Memorial School's morning program shuck corn for the school lunch in October 2009 ***(photo courtesy of Rumney Memorial School)***

CASE STUDY 5: Community Connections After-School Program

Rumney Memorial School, Middlesex, Vermont • Enrollment: 8-25, K-6

Rumney Memorial School started taste tests in the after-school program and vacation camps in 2004. At a time when the school nutrition committee was re-organizing and trying to come up with ways to introduce healthier options on the school lunch menu, a committee member who was also the school's Community Connections site coordinator saw the after-school program as an opportunity to try new foods through periodic taste tests. Taste tests continue in the Rumney Community Connections program today.

WHY THEY DO IT

Taste tests are a fun activity, and students have an extra chance to become familiar with new foods, or ones that will be introduced in the weekly snack taste test program. The small groups are more manageable; they can cut, stir, bake, and enjoy without the intensity of the classroom or the bustle of the cafeteria.

HOW THEY DO IT

The program is equipped with 25 small cutting boards, 25 knives, mixing bowls, and other kitchen supplies borrowed from the school's weekly snack program. After outdoor play and hand washing, a platter of produce or a tray of ingredients is presented to the group. "Safe" or familiar foods are always included, such as carrot sticks and apple slices, so that no one goes hungry. Students pass around the produce—smelling, feeling, describing, and then cutting open or peeling. If they make a recipe, all the students have a chance to participate in cutting, measuring and stirring. The program uses table-top hot plates and electric frying pans to make the snack, or the school kitchen if baking is required. As a group they try the finished product and vote whether they liked it and would eat it again.

Featured Tastings

Over the years, Rumney's after-school program has made and taste tested:

- salsa
- roasted root vegetables
- cream cheese, banana and honey roll-ups in a whole wheat tortilla
- crepes with fresh fruit
- oatmeal with a variety of toppings
- yogurt & granola parfaits
- hummus

SUCCESSES

- The after-school program exposed a large number of students to new foods and nutrition education.
- Students who have tried foods in the program are familiar with the foods and eager to encourage peers to try the foods if they're on the lunch menu or featured in the weekly snack program.
- The success of the taste testing in the after-school program helped secure a farm to school grant, which enabled the school to add weekly taste testing of local foods in classrooms.
- Morning and after-school program students often help prepare foods for the taste tests (shucking fresh local corn, chopping apples for applesauce, or peeling apples for apple crisp).

Just for laughs!

A Rumney parent picking up his daughter from the after school program heard that she'd enjoyed a winter root salad with raw beets. He exclaimed, "You never eat beets at home." His daughter smiled and replied, "That's because you cook them!"

CHALLENGES

- Exploring new foods can be costly. Programs do not have a large budget for food and snacks unless students pay a little extra to cover costs.
- Staff turnover makes regular taste testing a challenge.

ACTION PLAN

- Continue using the morning and after-school programs as opportunities for students to prep local foods for the lunch or snack program.
- Work with Site Coordinator to encourage more taste tests and snack preparations and to offer cooking activities every session.

Working With and Engaging Others

Individual action can make a difference, but there is power in numbers. You may need to involve others to convince decision makers to support a taste testing program in your school. Remember the VT FEED "3 C's" model: a successful program incorporates classroom, cafeteria and community. Seek the support of parents, community leaders and health professionals who might share your goals, work with existing community networks or groups, or gather a new group. Don't forget that the school nurse, PE teacher, after-school program, and the PTO can be good allies.

Partner with existing networks, organizations, businesses and food activists. The PTO, community health professionals and organizations, restaurants, local businesses, or non-profit groups might be interested in joining your efforts. They might even help you fund the taste tests.

Seek support and partnerships in likely and unlikely places. Approach individuals and groups that you know have influence in your community or expertise on community issues. Search out local groups like neighborhood or civic associations that are unaffiliated with national organizations. If an individual or organization cannot participate in person but could advocate to the school board or provide other support, ask them to communicate with decision makers on their own. For example, the local public health department may not be able to join your food committee, but it might be able to develop a fact sheet on the positive effects of increased fruit and vegetable consumption, which could be helpful to your cause.

Mechanisms for Purchasing Food Locally

More and more schools in Vermont are purchasing local foods from local farmers. They do this through a variety of methods that may affect how you get foods for your taste tests. For a complete description of these, see the *VT FEED Guide for Using Local Food in Schools*.

Wholesale Distributors

When purchasing from a distributor, request local food products whenever possible and the names of the farms from which they purchase; it makes distributors more aware of customer demand.

Direct Purchasing

Some schools purchase bulk food products at wholesale prices directly from farmers. Food service staff call farmers directly, or a farmer may contact the food service director. Here are some direct purchasing options:

CSA PROGRAM (COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE)

CSA subscribers receive regular shares of a farm's harvest after paying in early spring a farmer's upfront for yearly operating costs. Some schools 'buy-down' from the list of produce the farm provides. As a subscriber, a school may also be a part of the harvesting on the farm, which is an opportunity for hands-on education.

CONTRACT GROWING

In some school districts, farmers and the school food service director plan together each winter to identify foods the food program can use for the coming school year. Contract growing can save your program money because if farmers can secure a market for their products ahead of time, you could negotiate a better cost per pound.

Getting Local Food Delivered

Delivery arrangements are often a unique collaboration between farms and schools. Some options to consider:

- Farmers may choose to work with a school district that utilizes a central food service facility in order to deliver to one site rather than to multiple schools.
- Growers may add destinations to an established delivery route. For example, a farmer may be able to deliver to schools on the same day she goes to the farmer's market or delivers to restaurants.
- If several farms are delivering to a school district, they can collaborate by bringing their products to one farm and have that farmer do the deliveries for all of them.

Ferrisburgh Central School students' work in the school gardens that provide produce for the lunch program ***(photo courtesy of Ferrisburgh Central School)***

MARKETING COOPERATIVE

Some farmers work together to share in the distribution, marketing, processing, selling or billing of their products. Buying from a cooperative of farms makes it easier for farmers to get their products to your food program and easier for you to call just one number.

DISTRICT PURCHASING COOPERATIVE

School districts that hire or find a part-time local purchasing coordinator (such as a motivated parent with business experience) are able to find significant savings by arranging for sale prices on behalf of their school.

Donated and School-Grown Food

GROW A ROW FOR SCHOOL

Students plant a particular crop at a farm they visit in the spring. The following fall, the class harvests the crop and brings it to the school to be stored or processed and frozen for later use.

GROW A ROW AT HOME

Some innovative food service programs agree to receive produce donations all fall from local families. Family food donations to schools were the foundation of school lunches prior to the start of the USDA program.

SCHOOL PRODUCTION GARDENS

School gardens are a good way of providing vegetables and herbs for school kitchens, classroom taste tests and ongoing nutrition education. Some schools are growing larger quantities of selected vegetables for storage or processing, so that produce can be served throughout the school year. Be sure to practice safe harvesting and handling procedures.

Appendices

A School Year of Seasonal Recipes

Corn Pie

SEPTEMBER

INGREDIENTS
3 large eggs
½ small onion
1 Tb. flour
1 Tb. sugar
½ tsp. salt
1⅓ cup milk
3 Tb. melted butter, slightly cooled
2 cups fresh corn kernels (cut from 2-3 cobs and lightly steamed) *or* frozen and thawed corn
1 deep dish pie crust *(use a purchased crust or see recipe below.)*

FEATURED VEGETABLE:
• Corn •

Combine first five ingredients in food processor. Blend until onion is finely chopped (or finely chop onion by hand and stir all together in a large bowl). Add milk and cooled melted butter and process or stir until well blended. Transfer to a large bowl if using food processor. Mix in corn. Pour mixture into uncooked pie crust shell. Bake at 375° until filling is slightly puffed and top is golden, about 50 minutes. Cool slightly before serving.

Serves 8

Easy Pie Crust
1½ cups flour
1½ tsp. sugar
½ cup canola oil
2 Tb. milk

Mix flour and sugar directly in pie pan. Make a well in the center. Mix oil and milk and pour into well. Mix together with a fork until mostly blended, then use hands to press crust around and up edges of the pan. Fill and bake as directed in recipe.

Recipe provided by Rumney Memorial and Calais Elementary Schools

Apple-Cheese Quesadilla

OCTOBER

INGREDIENTS
12 apples, cored and thinly sliced
50 ounces grated Vermont Cheddar
25 whole wheat tortillas

FEATURED FRUIT: • Apple •

Place 2 oz. of cheese and apple slices (about ½ an apple per tortilla) on one half of a tortilla. Fold over and spray lightly with oil. Bake at 350° for 10-15 minutes. Cut tortillas in half before serving.
Serves 50

Recipe provided by Rumney Memorial School

Butternut Biscuits

NOVEMBER

WET INGREDIENTS
2 ⅔ cup milk
1 cup canola oil
4 cups cooked, mashed butternut squash (Bake squashes cut side down on oiled and watered sheets at 400° for 45 minutes, or until soft)

DRY INGREDIENTS
4 cups whole wheat flour
4 cups flour
¼ cup sugar
¼ cup baking powder
2 tsp. baking soda
2 tsp. salt
2 tsp. cinnamon

FEATURED VEGETABLE:
• Butternut Squash •

Mix dry ingredients into wet, being careful not to over mix. Use a ¼ cup ice cream scoop to make drop biscuits onto parchment lined sheet pans. Lightly flatten the balls of dough. Bake at 400° in a regular oven, or 350° in a convection oven. Check after 5 minutes, bake until golden brown.

Makes 48 biscuits. For 150, make recipe 3 times

Recipe provided by Rumney Memorial School

Roasted Root Vegetables

DECEMBER

INGREDIENTS
15 lbs. potatoes
2 lbs. parsnips
5 lbs. carrots
5 lbs. beets
5 lbs. winter squash
¾ cup canola oil, or enough to coat veggies
kosher salt and pepper to taste

FEATURED VEGETABLES:
• Root Vegetables •

Dice vegetables using a commercial food processor or by hand. Toss with oil, salt and pepper in a large bowl. Spread onto 5 sheet pans lined with parchment paper and sprayed with oil. Roast at 350° until crispy, 30-40 minutes, stirring every 10 minutes. *Serves 150 3-oz cups*

Recipe provided by Rumney Memorial School

Apple Oatmeal Muffins

JANUARY

DRY INGREDIENTS
4 cups oats
4 cups whole wheat flour
1 ⅓ cup sugar
¼ cup baking powder
2 tsp. cinnamon
2 tsp. salt

WET INGREDIENTS
1 cup plain lowfat yogurt
2 cups milk
1 cup oil
1 cup applesauce
1 tsp. vanilla
4 eggs
4 apples, cored, chopped (small pieces)

FEATURED GRAINS:
• Oats & Whole Wheat Flour •

Beat wet ingredients together, add chopped apples. Combine dry ingredients in a separate bowl and add to wet ingredients being careful not to over mix. Spoon batter into greased muffin tins and sprinkle with brown sugar, if desired. Bake at 400° for about 20 minutes (15 minutes if using mini-muffin tins). In a convection oven, bake at 350° for 5 minutes, then rotate pans and cook 2-3 minutes more.

Makes 48 mini-muffins. For 144, make recipe 3 times.

Recipe provided by Rumney Memorial School

Balsamic Glazed Beets

FEBRUARY

INGREDIENTS
20 lbs. beets, scrubbed and trimmed, leaving about 1-inch of stems attached
1 cup balsamic vinegar
½ cup plus 2 Tb. maple syrup or honey
½ cup plus 2 Tb. olive oil
¼ cup minced fresh thyme or other herb

FEATURED VEGETABLE: • Beets •

In a large pot (or divide between 2 large pots) cover beets with salted water by 1 inch. Simmer, covered, 35-45 minutes, or until tender, and drain in colander. Cool until they can be handled, then slip off skins and stems. Cut beets lengthwise into wedges. Beets may be prepared up to this point 2 days ahead and chilled, covered. Bring beets to room temperature before proceeding. In a large skillet stir together vinegar, syrup or honey, and oil. Add beets. Cook beet mixture with salt and pepper to taste over moderate heat, stirring, until heated through and coated well. Sprinkle with herbs and toss gently.

Serves 150 sample sizes

Recipe provided by Calais Elementary School

Potato Fritata

MARCH

INGREDIENTS
20 lbs. local potatoes, thinly sliced
6 dozen local eggs
5 lbs. local onions, chopped
¼ cup oil
salt and pepper to taste
8-10 cups grated mild cheddar or mozzarella cheese

FEATURED VEGETABLE: • Potatoes •

Bake thin layers of potatoes on 4 full-sized sheet pans, sprayed and lined with parchment paper. Bake at 450° (400° for a convection oven) until fully cooked and golden brown (20-25 minutes). Sauté all of the onions in oil until soft, 5-10 minutes. Mix 18 eggs and ¼ cup milk together in a bowl. Add salt and pepper to taste. Take ¼ of the cooked potatoes, ¼ of the sautéed onions, and place them onto a half sheet pan sprayed and lined with parchment paper. Pour the egg mixture onto the potato/onions and cook at 350° for 5-9 minutes until egg is nearly cooked through. Sprinkle 2 cups of grated cheese on egg and bake again for 2-3 minutes. One half sheet pan makes 40 servings. Repeat with remaining eggs and potato/onion 3 more times to make a total of 160 pieces.

Serves 160 pieces of fritata

Recipe provided by Rumney Memorial School

Carrot & Raisin Sunshine Salad

APRIL

INGREDIENTS
10 lbs. local carrots (5 to 6) grated
5 cups raisins
80 oz. (2 ½, 32-oz. containers) lowfat vanilla yogurt
10 diced local apples

FEATURED VEGETABLE:
• Carrots •

Mix all ingredients together in a mixing bowl. Cover and refrigerate for 15 minutes. Toss again before serving.

Serves 100 sample sizes

Recipe provided by Calais Elementary School

Parsnip & Potato Chips

MAY

INGREDIENTS
15 lbs. parsnips, peeled and thinly sliced
10 lbs. potatoes, thinly sliced
1 cup or more, canola oil
kosher salt to taste

FEATURED VEGETABLES:
• Parsnips & Potatoes •

Toss parsnips and potatoes in separate bowls with oil and salt until lightly coated. Place a thin layer of parsnips onto sprayed and parchment paper lined sheet pans. Do the same with potatoes. Do not mix together until they are fully cooked. (Parsnips take a bit longer to crisp.) Cook at 400°, checking every 10 minutes until fully cooked and crispy. Combine together and serve in small paper cups.

Serves 150 sample sizes

Recipe provided by Rumney Memorial School

Rumney Garden Wraps

JUNE

INGREDIENTS
75 whole wheat tortillas, 8-inch round
4 lbs. mesclun greens
3 lbs. spinach
3 beets, grated
3 lbs. carrots, grated
2 bunches salad turnips, grated
Salad dressing *(see below)*

Maple-Balsamic Vinaigrette
1 cup balsamic vinegar
1 cup maple syrup
1-2 cloves garlic, minced
4 cups olive oil

FEATURED VEGETABLES:
• Lettuce & Spinach •

Toss your salad ingredients and set aside. Next, mix the first three vinaigrette ingredients. As you stir, slowly add the olive oil in a thin stream, stirring constantly. Pour a bit of the dressing onto your salad (this recipe makes a few days worth of dressing). Wrap the salad in a whole wheat tortilla. Slice tortilla in half at an angle. Enjoy!

Serves 150

Recipe provided by Rumney Memorial School

Fun Seasonal Food Facts

APPLES

One medium apple is one serving. Apples are high in fiber and vitamin C. They also contain potassium, antioxidants, iron, calcium and vitamin A. When using a round apple slicer, push slicer through center of apple, but don't push down all the way. Remove apple and slices will "bloom" from the core. It's a Bloomin' Apple!

BEETS

Beets are high in vitamin C and folate. The chioggia (pronounced Kee-o-jya) beet is red on the outside, but red and white striped on the inside. The chioggia beet is also known as a candystripe beet or a bull's eye beet. There are also golden beets and red beets.

CARROTS

Carrots are high in beta carotene, which is necessary for healthy vision. They also help your heart and immune system, and are a good source of vitamin C. Did you know that if you eat a lot of carrots your skin can turn orange?

CORN

Corn is high in Vitamin B, fiber, and vitamin C. Every ear of corn has an even number of rows of kernels. Count out the rows and see for yourself!

OATS

Oats are a good source of calcium and iron and are thought to help reduce cholesterol levels and reduce the chance of heart attacks when eaten as part of a balanced diet. Oats are great in oatmeal, cookies, breads, muffins, and granola. Try making homemade granola and sprinkling it on yogurt with a ¼ cup fresh fruit. Makes a delicious and healthy breakfast treat!

PARSNIPS

Parsnips are high in fiber, vitamin C, vitamin K, folate and potassium. Parsnips are best picked after they have been overwintered in the ground. The cold helps break down the sugars to create a flavorful spring treat! Slice them into thin rounds and roast them in a 400° oven to make parsnip chips—a delicious snack!

POTATOES

Potatoes are a source of carbohydrates and are full of vitamins C and B6. A ½ cup of cooked potato equals one serving. Plant a row of potatoes at your school in the spring and then have a treasure hunt in the fall! Dig for "gold" and find the potato treasures hidden beneath the soil!

SPINACH

Spinach is high in iron and calcium and rich in antioxidants, which help protect the cells in our bodies. How many words can you find using the letters in GREEN SPINACH?

WINTER SQUASH

Winter squash is high in vitamin A, vitamin C, dietary fiber, and potassium. Bake delicata squash as a tasty and fun treat for kids and adults. Slice squash in half lengthwise, remove seeds and slice into half circle shapes. Bake in a 400° oven for 20-30 minutes. "Delicata Smiles" are sure to impress even the pickiest eater! You can even eat the skin!

WHOLE WHEAT FLOUR

Whole wheat is a good source of iron, calcium, fiber, and other minerals. It can substitute for half of the white flour in most recipes to boost nutritional value. Whole wheat flour is made by grinding the entire wheatberry. It has a shorter shelf life than white flour and should be refrigerated or frozen to extend use. The process of making whole wheat flour is much easier than that of white flour, but it's still more expensive to buy!

Cafeteria Taste Test Survey

Featured Food: _____ Date of Test: _____

Tried it	Liked it	Didn't Like it	Want it for Lunch	Grade

Classroom Taste Test Summary Sheet

Teachers, please complete below for item(s) shown

Teacher/Grade:_____ Date: _____

Did the students help prepare the snack? Y or N (circle one)

# of students present: _____

ITEM #1 _____

1. How many students tried the snack? _____
2. How many students liked the snack?_____
3. How many students would eat it again? _____

ITEM #2 _____

1. How many students tried the snack? _____
2. How many students liked the snack?_____
3. How many students would eat it again? _____

ITEM #3_____

1. How many students tried the snack? _____
2. How many students liked the snack?_____
3. How many students would eat it again? _____

courtesy of Rumney Memorial School

Specialized Taste Test Survey

(Cut out and give one survey form to each student)

LOCALLY GROWN GREENS TASTE TEST **GRADE:** _____

Check off whether you tried it, liked it, and would try it again.

Green Name:	Kale	Swiss Chard	Spinach	Lettuce	Bok Choy
Tried It					
Liked It					
Would Try It Again					

LOCALLY GROWN GREENS TASTE TEST **GRADE:** _____

Check off whether you tried it, liked it, and would try it again.

Green Name:	Kale	Swiss Chard	Spinach	Lettuce	Bok Choy
Tried It					
Liked It					
Would Try It Again					

LOCALLY GROWN GREENS TASTE TEST **GRADE:** _____

Check off whether you tried it, liked it, and would try it again.

Green Name:	Kale	Swiss Chard	Spinach	Lettuce	Bok Choy
Tried It					
Liked It					
Would Try It Again					

LOCALLY GROWN GREENS TASTE TEST **GRADE:** _____

Check off whether you tried it, liked it, and would try it again.

Green Name:	Kale	Swiss Chard	Spinach	Lettuce	Bok Choy
Tried It					
Liked It					
Would Try It Again					

courtesy of Rumney Memorial School

Individual Voting Ballots for Taste Tests Parties

Cut out and give one ballot to each child

TASTE TEST Product _____ Date_____ (circle one): **Like! Sort of... Don't Like**	**TASTE TEST** Product _____ Date_____ (circle one): **Like! Sort of... Don't Like**	**TASTE TEST** Product _____ Date_____ (circle one): **Like! Sort of... Don't Like**
TASTE TEST Product _____ Date_____ (circle one): **Like! Sort of... Don't Like**	**TASTE TEST** Product _____ Date_____ (circle one): **Like! Sort of... Don't Like**	**TASTE TEST** Product _____ Date_____ (circle one): **Like! Sort of... Don't Like**
TASTE TEST Product _____ Date_____ (circle one): **Like! Sort of... Don't Like**	**TASTE TEST** Product _____ Date_____ (circle one): **Like! Sort of... Don't Like**	**TASTE TEST** Product _____ Date_____ (circle one): **Like! Sort of... Don't Like**
TASTE TEST Product _____ Date_____ (circle one): **Like! Sort of... Don't Like**	**TASTE TEST** Product _____ Date_____ (circle one): **Like! Sort of... Don't Like**	**TASTE TEST** Product _____ Date_____ (circle one): **Like! Sort of... Don't Like**

adapted from Kathy Alexander, Ferrisburgh Central School, Ferrisburgh, VT, 2009

Sample Classroom Sign-up Sheet for Monthly Taste Tests

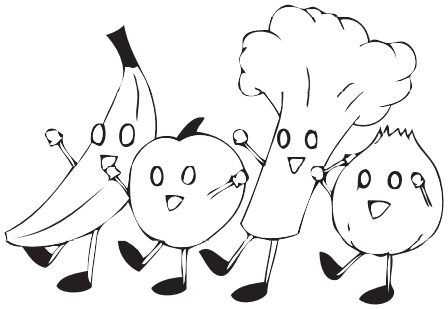
"Rozo McLaughlin (F.E.E.D.) Days," Sharon Elementary School

MONTH & DAY	CLASS/TEACHER	FEATURED SEASONAL FOOD ITEM
September		
October		
November		
December		
January		
February		
March		
April		
May		
June		

adapted from Meg Hopkins and Keenan Haley, Sharon Elementary School

Sample Letter to Families

with Nutritional Information and Recipe



Dear Families,

This month's recipe is a delicious soup made from local butternut squash, carrots and onions. Winter squash and carrots are great sources of vitamin K, which promotes good vision, as well as healthy bones and skin. Butternut squash, in particular, is one of the very best sources of this important nutrient. The orange color comes from beta carotene, which is what your body uses to manufacture just the right amount of vitamin K for your needs. Beta carotene is an antioxidant, which also helps prevent heart disease and cancer. We hope you try this soup at home, but remember that you can always try it in the cafeteria with your child by sending in a note saying you'd like to join us for lunch. This soup will be served on [*insert date from lunch menu*].

Butternut Squash Soup *(adapted from a recipe by Paula Deen)*

2 lb Butternut Squash, halved, peeled and seeded; cut into 1-inch pieces
1 cup diced onion
2 carrots, peeled and diced
3 cans chicken (or vegetable) broth (13 ¾-ounces each)
½ teaspoon salt
2 Tablespoons butter
1/3–1/2 cup light cream or milk

Place squash in saucepan along with carrots, onions, and broth then add in the salt. Simmer 40 minutes uncovered. Puree soup in a blender or food processor along with 2 tablespoons butter. Pour a little hot puree into the 1/3–1/2 cup cream so not to curdle the cream; add to soup.

Yield: 4 servings • Preparation time: 15 min. • Cooking time: 40 min. • Ease of preparation: Easy

courtesy of Laura Fillbach, Calais Elementary School

Nutrition Lesson #6
Butternut Squash Soup

This nutrition lesson is given to parent volunteers at Calais Elementary School who make the recipe at home and then bring it into their child's classroom for a taste test.

FOR THE VOLUNTEER BEFORE THE TASTE TEST:

About the Recipe:
Our recipe for this month will be one that students may remember trying in the cafeteria last year. The hardest part of the recipe is preparing the squash; after that it is pretty simple. You will need a blender or food processor. If your class has vegetarians, use the vegetable broth. You can also try it with soy milk and no butter if you want to make it dairy-free.

Recipe:

2 lbs. Butternut Squash, halved, peeled and seeded; cut into 1-inch pieces
1 cup diced onion
2 carrots, peeled and diced
3 cans chicken (or vegetable) broth (13 ¾-ounces each)
½ teaspoon salt
2 Tablespoons butter
1/3–1/2 cup light cream or milk

Place squash in saucepan along with carrots, onions, and broth then add in the salt. Simmer 40 minutes uncovered. Puree soup in a blender or food processor along with 2 tablespoons butter. Pour a little hot puree into the 1/3–1/2 cup cream so not to curdle the cream; add to soup. This will make more than enough for one class. You could easily halve the recipe if you don't want leftovers (but it's so good, I bet you will)!

You can make it the night before and reheat it in the morning. If you have a thermos, that is probably the best way to transport it to school. Then just pour the soup straight into the sample cups.

WHAT TO TELL STUDENTS AT THE TASTE TEST:

There are three vegetables in this soup:

1. **Butternut squash** – This is the star of our recipe. Hold up a butternut squash and see if the students can identify it. This type of squash is called "winter squash," not because it

grows in the winter, but because it has a tough skin which allows us to store it through the winter time. This is different from a "summer squash," like zucchini, which does not keep. Ask students if they can name any other winter squashes (pumpkin, buttercup, butternut, delicata, spaghetti). You can ask if anyone knows what the squash looks like on the inside. If you cut it open, you would see the orange flesh and the seeds in the middle. Most winter squash are orange inside; and in general, orange foods are good sources of vitamin A. Vitamin A is important for good vision, bone and skin health. Winter squash tastes creamy and mild, and often sweet. The school cook gets local winter squash that has been cooked and pureed and then frozen. This makes it much easier to use it whenever she wants to make this soup.

2. **Carrots** – Another orange vegetable in this soup is the carrot. Carrots are also good sources of vitamin A.

3. **Onions** – There are some onions in this soup, but you won't notice them because they have been blended together with the other ingredients to a smooth puree. Onions are a popular food in almost all parts of the world. Both onions and carrots are available to our cafeteria from Vermont farms.

HOW TO CONDUCT THE TASTE TEST:

Pass out samples of the soup. Go over the remaining ingredients (broth, milk/cream, butter, salt) so that kids can focus on the flavors they taste. Have them close their eyes while try it. Conduct a survey. Did they taste it? Did they like it? Would they eat it again? Point out when this soup will be served in the cafeteria at school.

adapted from Laura Fillbach, Calais Elementary School

Taste Test Do's and Don'ts

TASTE TESTS DO'S	TASTE TEST DON'TS
Involve as many teachers, food service employees, parents, and other interested, school community linked adults as possible.	Expect things to happen too quickly. (*Substantive change takes time, dedication, set backs, disappointment and hard work.)*
Empower your food service workers to take over roles. More than merely "lunch ladies," food service workers have valuable insights into the eating habits and preferences of the students they serve daily.	Immediately ask kids what they want. *(You likely know the answer: pizza, french fries, ice cream, soda, and candy are likely to be their ideas for improving school lunch.)*
Provide students with choices from pre-selected, preferably locally grown or produced food items. Having options is good, but keep it within a reasonable scope based on availability and cost.	Introduce strange, exotic, or hard-to-get foods. (*Kids will try lots of things but their palates are not necessarily ready for "adult" foods. Also, cafeterias are unlikely to offer exotic foods that are hard to find and/or pay for.)*
Involve students in the preparation, serving, sampling, and tabulation of results from classroom or cafeteria-based taste tests.	Expect kids to love the food you're offering if they didn't have a hand in the preparation or were not involved in the taste test process.
Strengthen connections between teachers, administrators, and food service personnel by attempting to include them in normal school functions such as faculty meetings, awards or celebration ceremonies, lunch-related events and other in-class goings on.	Think changes can be made without the help and support of the food service personnel and food service director. (*Everyone should be focused on the same goal: serving students nutritious food, and it takes a variety of adult roles to see this come to fruition.)*
Think sustainability — testing food items you can serve with some regularity is better than offering exotic foods that will never find their way to lunch trays.	Be discouraged if food isn't accepted right away. (*Word of mouth, peer pressure, and repeated exposure will help build interest.)*

adapted from Dan Treinis, teacher, Burlington School Food Project

Safety Tips for Cooking with Children & Youth

Safety is the #1 priority when cooking with children. Adults should supervise all food preparation and cooking activities.

1 **Be sure to wash your hands with soap and water before touching food.**
Teach proper hygiene and respect in the kitchen. Gloves can be used if the products will be served raw. If the products will be cooked, gloves are not required.

2 **Start with a clean cooking area.**
Clean all counter tops and surfaces before preparing food on them.

3 **Be careful with knives (and other tools like graters).**
Teach children the proper ways to hold them, wash them, carry them and store them. Instill the importance and responsibility that comes with safe knife and equipment handling. Most children take this responsibility very seriously.

4 **Tie back long hair and pull up long sleeves before washing hands.**
Try to eliminate as many possible hygiene or safety interferences prior to cooking.

5 **Do only one job at a time and avoid multiple distractions.**
It's easy for children to get exited and sidetracked with too many tasks and environmental distractions. Try to provide a calm and focused environment so that the students can engage in the task at hand.

6 **Work in small groups.**
Cooking with children is most successful when they can work in groups of no more than 5-6 (with at least 1 adult per group). Younger groups benefit from even smaller groups. Cooking in the classroom is a great way to involve parent volunteers and increase the number of adults in the classroom for cooking activities.

7 **Encourage teamwork!**
Cooking together is a great way to build relationships and learn to work together. Try dividing the recipe and cooking jobs up so that everyone can participate equally. Encourage students to work together when measuring, mixing and monitoring food preparation.

8 **Play it safe!**
When it comes to buying, preparing, cooking and storing food - check expiration dates, wash your produce well, cook (cooked food) thoroughly and store foods properly so they don't spoil.

9 **Clean up!**
Include cleaning up and composting as part of the activity time.

10 **Have FUN!**
Cooking with children is enjoyable and rewarding. Teach a child to cook and you feed him/her for a lifetime!

courtesy of Danielle Pipher, VT FEED

Bibliography & Other Resources

The following Web sites provide food pyramid information and nutrition facts and figures that you can use to create handouts:

Serving-size information for kids by age, and examples of foods from each group.
www.kidshealth.org/kid/stay_healthy/food/pyramid.html

Kid-friendly news on nutrition: *www.usda.gov/news/usdakids*

The new USDA food pyramid includes an easy-to-use calculator to help figure out how many servings of each food group a child should eat every day: *www.mypyramid.gov*

Fun interactive PBS Kids Website: Fizzy's Lunch Lab: *www.pbskids.org/lunchlab*

Books to Consider:

The Secret Life of Food, Clare Crespo. Hyperion Books for Children, 2002. *Grades K–8*

Play with your Food, Joost Elffers. Metrobooks, 2002. *All ages*

Food is Elementary, Antonia Demas, Food Studies Institute 2001. *Classroom curriculum for teachers*

The Edible Pyramid, Good Eating Every Day, Loreen Leedy. Holiday House, revised edition, 2007. *Grades pre-K–3*

How to Make An Apple Pie And See The World, Marjorie Priceman. Dragonfly Books, paperback 1996. *Grades 1–3*

Good Enough To Eat – A Kid's Guide To Food And Nutrition, Lizzy Rockwell. Harper Collins, 1999. *Grades K–3*

Oliver's Vegetables, Vivian French. Scholastic, Inc. 1998. *Grades pre-K–3*

Honest Pretzels: And 64 Other Amazing Recipes for Cooks Ages 8 & Up, Mollie Katzen. Tricycle Press, 2009. *Grades 2–6*

What Food is This? Rosmarie Hausherr. Scholastic, Inc., 1994. *Grades K–6*

Kids in the Kitchen: 100 Delicious, Fun & Healthy Recipes to Cook and Bake, Micah Pulleyn & Sarah Bracken. Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 1994. *Grades 3–5*

Fairy Tale Feasts: A Literary Cookbook for Young Readers & Eaters, Tales retold by Jane Yolen, Recipes by Heidi E.Y. Stemple. Crocodile Books, 2006. *Grades pre-K–5*

Simply in Season Children's Cookbook: Fun with Food from Garden to Table, Mark Beach and Julie Kauffman, Herald Press, 2006. *Grades 2–6*

Chew on This: Everything you Don't Want to Know About Fast Food, Eric Schlosser and Charles Wilson. Houghton Mifflin Co., 2006. *Grades 7 and up*

Visual Food Encyclopedia, Wiley Publishing, 1996. *All ages*

Fresh From the Farm: the Massachusetts Farm to School Cookbook, Amy Colter. Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, *www.mass.gov/agr*

Fruit and Veggie Quantity Recipe Cookbook, New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health Services Fruit and Vegetable Program, July 2009. 603-271-4830 *www.dhhs.nh.gov/DHHS/NHP/fruitsandveggies*