

Name of school: Chesnut Charter Elementary

Name of project: Chesnut Charter Elementary Simulated Farmers Market with Chef Demo

Name of project coordinator: Angela Renals

1. Number of children impacted/served by grant: 445
2. Number of other stakeholders impacted/served by grant: Approximately 60

*Teachers: 20*

*Parents: 30*

*Cafeteria staff: 4*

*Others 6: Principal, Assistant Principal, Front Office Staff*

3. Brief description of project

At this year's Field Day, local organic farmer Dave Bentoski from D and A Farm, and local traveling pizza baker S&J's Woodfired Pizza demonstrated that eating nutritious, locally grown food can be easy and delicious; and in accordance with Dekalb County's Wellness Policy, offered a healthy snack to student body and staff at the event. Using toppings provided by the local farmer as well as herbs and toppings freshly harvested from Chesnut's organic school garden, S&J's Woodfired Pizza baked pizzas onsite. While sampling strawberry-ricotta and arugula onion pizzas, students contemplated the environmental impact of the freshly picked produce, comparing it to the normal trip that produce makes to the grocery store, using posters provided by ecology club students. Next each student shopped the farmer's stand, where they met the farmer who grew their food and read the seed to harvest story of the day's arugula (depicted on a poster created by ecology club students). Each student chose a bunch of arugula and a bunch of onions to take home (free of charge), along with a pizza recipe, the Dekalb County Wellness Policy, and information about local farmers markets and pick-your-own farms.

- a. Accomplishments:

We replaced a cotton candy and sugary drink food station with a healthy alternative: fresh-baked pizzas with locally grown vegetables, fruit and herbs. All Chesnut students got a taste of the farmers' market experience, and proudly brought home fresh produce to share at home.

Lessons Learned:

- When you take delicious smelling and tasting pizza and add healthy toppings, it's still a winner! Very little went to waste, and while many of the kids went for the sweeter strawberry-ricotta square first, it was so delicious that most moved on to the arugula-onion piece without pause.

- Involving the children made a difference. The ecology club students themselves were challenged to review what they had learned about local eating, and share it.

Those who had worked on the posters at our after-school meeting earlier in the week were so proud; they couldn't wait to share it with their classmates. And as they presented their work, they had their peers' full attention - what a great way to teach.

- Consider dietary restrictions! We had a handful of parents speak up about their children's vegan diets. Thankfully the arugula-onion slice with cheese omitted worked for them.

b. Challenges/solutions:

- Heavy rain leading up to Field Day limited the strawberry harvest, such that we had enough for pizza toppings, but not as take-home produce as originally planned. Dave Bentoski of D & A Farm coordinated with Nicolas Donck of Crystal Organic Farm the day before the event to supplement his onion supply. Thankfully, it went wonderfully, as Nicolas contributed heirloom torpedo onions, introducing the kids and grown-ups alike to the fact that farmers' markets can expose you to interesting varieties unlike what you see in the grocery store.

c. Impact on students (i.e. understanding of local food system, preference for healthy foods, desire to learn more about food and growing, making healthy choices including eating and physical activity, etc.) (see e.)

d. Stories and quotes from students, staff, teachers impacted by project:

Many, many thanks from the teachers and parents (this may have helped us get approval for a bonafide PTA Wellness Committee). All loved the pizza, many were grateful that we omitted the sugary offerings. When we suggested that mothers might love the fresh produce as a gift for Mother's Day that weekend, many faces lit up, and one student exclaimed, "I'm going to take mine home and hide it under my bed until Sunday!" We advised refrigeration. While discussing the environmental impact, many students were stunned to learn that their fresh produce had been picked the day before, and guessed at how long ago produce from the West Coast would have to be picked (some guessed 2 weeks or a month). All knew to say that eating fresh produce was healthy, but many had to really think to figure out why. Eventually light bulbs went on and words like "photosynthesis" and "nutrients" started being used. They were very quick to see the environmental impact (energy, pollution), especially when using the visual aids the ecology club students had provided. Many were impressed with the thousands of miles we had taken off the vegetables' trip to our school by buying them from a local farm.

e. How will you sustain and continue your school's farm to school efforts?

This year we will run the ecology club and related farm to school programs out of our new PTA Wellness Committee, which will enforce DeKalb County's Wellness Policy, and give us a voice amongst Chesnut faculty and families. In our planning meeting for next year's ecology club, we determined to be as "hands-on" as possible, focusing more intensely on composting, worm composting, and gardening. We also are working with PTA to get a handful of speakers to help educate parents about healthy eating to help these lessons stick at home.

All our photos and reporting are available on the ecology club's blog: <http://chesnutforchange.wordpress.com/2012/05/20/strawberries-arugula-and-torpedo-onions-triumphover-cotton-candy/>

If you see any photos in the slideshow that you would like us to forward, just let me know!