

FoodCorps Montana Guide to Classroom to Cafeteria Connections

Involving teachers and student in cooking activities using local foods or garden-grown vegetables is one of the best ways to generate conversations with school food service about incorporating more local foods into school lunch service.

Creating “Classroom to Cafeteria Connections” is all about exposing and engaging students (and teachers and food service staff) with local foods multiple times in unique environments. When a student helps to prepare a kale salad and taste it in class and then sees kale served on the salad bar in the lunchroom, she is more likely to try the kale and like it, too. Providing parallel food experiences in the classroom and cafeteria is a great strategy to employ as a FoodCorps member.

At the beginning of the year and at the start of each season make sure to engage your food service director partners in a discussion about foods and recipes they may be interested to incorporate into the salad bar or lunch menu so that you can potentially assist by sampling these foods in advance. Keep food service staff also informed regarding farmers’ plans and desires to sell to schools, and try to communicate any advanced product availability they can predict.

If food service folks do not offer ideas or request specific support you can reference the following suggested calendar for **Montana Harvest of the Month** seasonal samplings:

September: Summer Squash
October: Kale
November: Apples
December: Winter Squash
January: Carrots
February: Beets, Dried & Frozen Cherries
March: Beef
April: Whole Grains
May: Lentils & Dry Beans
June: Mixed Greens, school garden produce

** For additional seasonal food ideas reference the **MT Seasonal Food Pocket Guide***

** For additional guidance on sourcing local food for schools, check out the **Farm to Cafeteria Manual for Montana***

- *For a list of producers in Montana with whom we have worked to source products:*

Planning an Activity

Creating a Classroom to Cafeteria Connection requires diligent communications on parallel fronts working with both school food staff and teachers. Steps never flow exactly in sequence, but the rough sketch of priorities and prerequisites follow this tentative outline below.

Steps under “Food Service” outline communications with your school food service director and/or staff, while steps under “Teachers” outline communications with teachers you will partner with.

1. *Planning in Advance*

Food Service:

- Preview menu for the upcoming month and discuss opportunities to feature seasonal foods.
- With the federal school lunch regulations in the 2010 Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act, in 2012 schools were required to go through an extensive process of submitting very detailed menu information of their typical menu pattern to the USDA including portion sizes of each item served every day. Apart from being very tedious and time intensive, this restricted the flexibility of food service to make menu adjustments from month to month. A more flexible approach for continuing to incorporate seasonal food is to select items that can be featured on the salad bar.

Teachers:

- Ascertain the schedule of upcoming lessons in all subject area as far into the future as possible so that you can identify potential seasonal food connections.
- Confirm with the teacher that she/he is comfortable with bringing food (and potentially cooking) into the classroom setting. Opportunities to easily do so may be during snack time or health class, for example.
- Utilize Harvest of the Month education activities & lessons (and other farm to school curriculum) to brainstorm ways to highlight and utilize available seasonal foods in the classroom.
- For example, connections may be as direct as discussing Montana history through the lens of the historical production of Montana wheat or simply using the foods as props to communicate another learning idea, such as making bread with Montana Wheat flour and incorporating fractions and measurements as you bake.
- Alternatively, tap into the creativity of your teacher partners and work together to create new lessons that incorporate food in creative ways.
- While some teachers require or strongly request that lessons tie in directly with their curriculum, other teachers are much more flexible in allowing and encouraging your interactions to directly communicate food system and nutrition topics – our work is all about honoring unique relationships with each of our partners.

**For a lesson-brainstorming tool reference the “Farm to School Curriculum Web.”*

2. ***Confirming Details***

Food Service: When you have agreed on a featured food and timing for local food service, provide sourcing options and pricing information to the food service director for the food. Once farmer and food service director have finalized the purchase negotiations, coordinate with both of them to determine logistics to ensure arrival of product when it is needed.

Teacher: When you have confirmed a local food item with school food staff (and potentially before you have finalized the purchasing and delivery details) propose 1-3 lessons, which connect with the teachers proposed topic area.

3. ***Preparation and Logistics***

Food Service: Ensure that product arrives at school when it is needed. Communicate any food preparation involved or classroom cooking plans with lunchroom food service. (Especially make sure to communicate when you will need to use the oven, or when you will need to borrow equipment from the kitchen.)

Teacher: Gather necessary lesson materials and plan any cooking logistics. Review any food preparations steps multiple times before teaching the lesson and communicate ways that the teacher can help manage the class and connect activities to his/her curriculum. If the result of your activity is that you plan to share food with other students in the school, prior to your lesson you may want to request that the teacher monitors the behavior of the students or their completion of assignments and select exemplary students to assist with distributing food to other students.

4. ***Execution***

Food Service: Arrive early enough to do any food preparation steps necessary before going to class.

Teacher: Have fun experiencing food with students!

** Review the "Cooking In the Classroom Guide" for classroom management advice*

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