

VERNON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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Vernon Students Sample Locally-Sourced Foods as Food and Nutrition Department expands Cafeteria Offerings

New Farm to School Coordinator introduces local, healthy good options

Since her arrival as the Vernon Public Schools Director of Food and Nutrition in August 2018, one of Elizabeth Fisher's goals has been to get locally-grown foods into school cafeteria meals. She made connections with local farmers through UConn's Extension's "Put Local on Your Tray" program and worked with cafeteria staff on healthy foods made from scratch with locally-sourced ingredients.



Kaylee Carlisle, Vernon's new Farm to Table Coordinator, at Vernon Center Middle School with samples of apple pie granola.

That ongoing effort took a giant leap forward this school year with the hiring of Kaylee Carlisle, the Vernon Public School's first Farm to School coordinator.

"Local foods are fresher, more flavorful and good for our students," Fisher said. "In the process we can support local farmers. And now with Kaylee, we have someone who can solely focus on local foods."

The Food and Nutrition Department's goal is to ensure Vernon students have good nutrition so that they are ready to learn.

"Kids need food in their bellies to learn," Fisher said. "We want to make sure kids are ready to learn and that they succeed in school so they can become productive members of society."

Using locally sourced foods also presents opportunities to expand students' palates, and that is part of Carlisle's mission.

The Vernon Public Schools, in partnership with family and community, is committed to provide a quality education, with high expectations, in a safe environment where all students become independent learners and productive contributors to society.

“We try to do some unusual foods,” Fisher said. “We did radishes, something most kids had never tried. We just recently did kale and added it to strawberry-banana smoothies and the middle school kids loved it. We called them lucky green smoothies.” (No trickery was involved. The kids knew they were eating kale.)

Other recent locally-sourced cafeteria offerings included tomato salad and broccoli and cheddar soup.

Carlisle’s work is more than finding local foods for the cafeterias. She educates Vernon school children about healthy local foods and takes samples to schools for children to taste test during their lunch periods.

During a recent visit to Vernon Center Middle School, Carlisle was handing out samples of apple pie granola made with local apples and honey and lots of kids were eager to try it.



Javon Wharton, a 7th grader at Vernon Center Middle School, approves of apple pie granola.

“I tell the students what I have and where the local product is from,” Carlisle said. She then asks the students to give her feedback. At the middle school there were three ratings: love it, like it and I tried it. Most responses fell into the love it or like it category.

As Carlisle wheeled her cart around the cafeteria, students eagerly reached out for samples. Several kids’ eyes went wide with delight when they took a bite. One boy loved it so much he followed Carlisle around the cafeteria to get more apple pie granola.

“I love it,” 7th grader Javon Wharton declared. “The honey and the granola, they’re perfect. I want more.”

The apple pie granola got rave reviews at each school Carlisle visited. Some students asked for recipe cards or for Carlisle to email their parents the recipe.

Carlisle has become known at the elementary schools and students are excited to see her.

“The kids are really enthusiastic and want to know what I have when I visit their school,” she said. Elementary school students tend to be more adventurous in trying to new things, she said.

“I had one little girl ask me to come to her school every day,” Carlisle said.

The goal is to get kids to try different foods. If they try something and decide they don’t like it, that’s OK. “Our message is that it is important to try new things,” she said.

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