



# Federal Farm-to-School Grant Program plows the way for more local produce in Walla Walla schools

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## **Federal Farm-to-School Grant Program plows the way for more local produce in Walla Walla schools**

Walla Walla Public Schools was awarded a \$96,000 United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Grant to increase local foods and education in district schools. The funding will also enhance educational opportunities for students, staff and the community about food and agriculture.

Longtime school garden advocate, parent volunteer and nutrition specialist Beth Thiel has been contracted to serve as the Farm-to-School grant coordinator for the school district.

"The goals of this grant will benefit students and the entire community by increasing the purchase of locally grown food for our school cafeterias," said Thiel. "It will also help us expand the utilization of school gardens, better educate young students about food and farming and teach district staff and parents about cooking healthy meals."

This fall Walla Walla students saw an increase in the amount and variety of fruits, vegetables and legumes served in school lunches; a requirement of the National School Lunch Program's Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010. Walla Walla students in grades K-12 are required to have at least a half a cup of fruits or vegetables on their tray at every meal.

"This is a positive change for student health," said Thiel. "The Farm-to-School program aims to ensure students are eating those extra fruits and vegetables daily."

One strategy Thiel is introducing in Walla Walla is working with area farmers to bring in more locally grown produce. Thiel says this move and others will entice students to make healthier food choices.

"By providing the freshest, most flavorful local produce, we can influence student preference for healthy foods," said Thiel. "School gardens and cooking activities, as well as farm field trips and farmer visits to schools, also play critical roles in educating students."

District Nutrition Services Department staff also benefit from the grant. These staff will participate in culinary classes, take tours to local farms and meet with area chefs to enhance the meals they are serving.

"The Nutrition Services Department is excited for the opportunity and now has the resources to build an excellent Farm-to-School program that will fit the needs of school children in Walla Walla," said Pamela Milleson, Director of Nutrition Services. "We live in a unique area which can provide a variety of produce and educational experience for our students."

Thiel also seeks volunteers to help support the program and farmers and chefs who are interested in learning how to get involved. Contact Beth Thiel for more information: 509.386.2037 or [wolcott.thiel@gmail.com](mailto:wolcott.thiel@gmail.com)