

Harvest of the Month brings local produce to the classroom

SUMMARY

During the 2018–2019 school year, UCCE CalFresh Healthy Living Nutrition Educators and El Dorado County farms partnered to bring local produce to Harvest of the Month tastings with kindergarten through 5th grade students at Camino Elementary School. For seven months, 290 students participated in 30-minute lessons and tastings about an in-season crop. Of the seven tastings, three were donated by local farms and one lesson was led by a local farmer.

BACKGROUND

El Dorado County is a rich agricultural region with over 120 farms, boasting a variety of crops like apples, pears, grapes and berries. While many students have a connection to a local farm through family members or field trips, there remains a lack of understanding about the importance of eating seasonally and supporting local food systems.

Harvest of the Month provides the perfect opportunity to discuss the benefits of eating in-season, local produce. Bolstering this discussion with donated fruits and vegetables by area farms has proven to be a huge success among Camino Elementary students and has helped bridge the gap between the farm and the grocery store. Donations from these farms have not only made it financially possible to provide tastings to approximately 290 students each month, but have also enhanced the program by highlighting the agricultural abundance in students' own backyards.

SOLUTION

With the help of a volunteer, Nutrition Educators coordinated with 13 classrooms at Camino Elementary to implement the monthly tastings and lessons. Using interactive visuals, educational videos and worksheets, Educators created engaging lesson plans that taught about the importance of eating healthy, locally-sourced produce. When the tasting was donated by a local farm, the lesson highlighted the farmer, the variety of crops grown at the farm and its proximity to the school.

For more information or to get involved, contact Katie Johnson, Nutrition Family and Consumer Sciences Advisor for the University of California Cooperative Extension in the Central Sierra at ckrjohnson@ucanr.edu.

"The kids love Harvest of the Month... It was a great moment in a curriculum full of reading and math to talk about their bodies and the foods they ate. Often they would leave for recess saying they were going to ask their parents to buy whatever it was we tasted."

-Dawn Wilson, 5th Grade Teacher



El Dorado County grape grower, Justin Boeger, speaks with Camino students about how grapes are grown during a Harvest of the Month tasting.

NEXT STEPS

In 2019-2020, Nutrition Educators hope to have 100% of all produce donated by local farms and to expand Harvest of the Month programming to other school sites in the county, possibly aided by a new partnership with Ag in the Classroom. It is also a goal to invite more farmers to participate in Harvest of the Month activities and speak with students about their crops, how food is grown and what it means to eat local.