

Partnership Brings a Taste of Local Produce to Students

SUMMARY

During the 2019-2020 school year, El Dorado County nutrition educators with CalFresh Healthy Living, UC Cooperative Extension (CFHL, UCCE) and Agriculture in the Classroom board members partnered to bring local, donated produce to cafeterias and classrooms at Camino Elementary and Pinewood Elementary. About 500 students in grades TK-5th at these two schools received education and a taste of seasonal produce through this Harvest of the Month (HOTM) partnership. Over the six months of programming, 250 students at Camino Elementary received monthly 30-minute long in-class lessons and a taste of in-season local produce, and about 300 students at Pinewood Elementary received a taste of the donated produce in their cafeteria.

BACKGROUND

El Dorado County is home to over 120 farms, orchards, and ranches that pride themselves on a history of growing quality produce, dating back to the Gold Rush. These farms grow a variety of crops like apples, grapes, squash, pears, berries, and citrus. Many students are aware of the farms in the surrounding area, but do not know about the abundance of available produce or the benefits of eating locally. Many farms are willing to support the education of students in the area, but are unaware of a way to help. The Harvest of the Month program is ideal to connect students with local farmers, as it focuses on teaching the benefits of eating seasonally and locally and allows students to taste the produce they learn about. Highlighting the location and growing practices of the donating farm teaches students what produce is available in their region, and what farm to fork really means.



A student at Pinewood Elementary in Pollock Pines votes on how they liked donated grapes.

SOLUTION

CFHL, UCCE Nutrition Educators partnered with the governing board of El Dorado County Ag in the Classroom, whose members are comprised of many local farmers, to facilitate the donation of local produce to Pinewood and Camino Elementary Schools. As part of the Harvest of the Month program, one item of donated produce was featured each month. A taste of the produce was offered to students in 13 classrooms and one cafeteria, and paired with an educational video on the nutritional, botanical, and historical information about the produce. The program also highlighted local availability and the donating farm.

"I had the opportunity to attend Harvest of the Month at Pinewood...I was impressed with how both staff and students were so excited about the project (and had obviously been looking forward to the taste for this month)."

-Christa Campbell, Ag in the Classroom Board Member

OUTCOME

Donations from local farms have made it financially possible to provide tastings to approximately 500 students each month. Over six months of programming, 250 students at Camino Elementary received monthly in-class lessons and tastings, and about 300 students at Pinewood Elementary had an opportunity to taste the produce in their cafeteria. By highlighting food grown within their town or the neighboring town, students developed an understanding of the diversity and quality of truly local produce. Students expressed that they planned to ask their parents to stop and purchase more produce from the local farms. Nutrition educators plan to continue to partner with Ag in the Classroom during the 2020-2021 school year, when they hope to bring a school-based farmers market to Pinewood Elementary. At this market, students will get to choose produce to take home while also learning about nutrition and agriculture from nutrition educators and local farmers.

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