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CT Grown for CT Kids Week

Highlight of October National Farm to School Month

(STATEWIDE) October is National Farm to School Month – a time to recognize and celebrate the connections within communities to fresh, healthy food and local food producers by changing food purchasing and education practices at schools and early care and education sites. With fewer than two percent of Americans living on farms, the U.S. population continues to be more removed from the agricultural practices that sustain them. Programs and activities surrounding farm to school help to bridge the gap while fostering new relationships.

"Farm to school is a holistic approach to engaging students in experiential learning about food and where it comes from. It is a farmer delivering local food to a student's lunch tray, as well as learning about that farmer and the communities that feed us; it's all encompassing," said Nyree Hodges, CT Farm to School Collaborative Coordinator. "The opportunities for cross-curricular integration are endless, even in a virtual learning environment. It bridges school and community by giving students agency to play an active role in improving our food system."

Here in Connecticut, October 5-9 is [CT Grown for CT Kids Week](#). Started in 2006 as a joint effort between the State Department of Education and Department of Agriculture, this week aims to celebrate and support local agriculture, public education, and their community commitment to the importance of healthy, nutritious meals in schools. Each year, legislators, food service directors, farmers, and students gather through farm to school activities and consumption of local products.

"The Connecticut Farm to School program ensures access to nutritious, delicious Connecticut Grown food for students while increasing market access for farmers throughout the state," said Agriculture Commissioner, Bryan P. Hurlburt. "CT Grown for CT Kids Week highlights the abundance of locally produced foods in an engaging and fun way for families to establish healthy eating practices."

While many of the activities this year will look different due to COVID-19, it's also an opportunity to honor all who contribute to feeding children and their communities – farmers, harvesters, food hub distributors, school nutrition professionals, educators and many others.

"You can't learn if you're hungry. Ensuring continued access to nutritious meals provides a critical lifeline and stability for children and households grappling with food insecurity, health crises, job losses,

isolation, and adapting to new ways of learning,” said Education Commissioner Miguel Cardona. “In addition to teaching students about our food systems and where their meals come from, Farm to School month and CT Grown for CT Kids Week allows us to further celebrate the work of our farmers, food service heroes, and child nutrition partners to bring quality local foods to schools across the state – over 14 million since March.”

Students, families, and educators across Connecticut are invited to celebrate CT Grown for CT Kids Week by participating in the 5th annual HardCORE Apple and Pear Challenge. All you need is a Connecticut Grown apple or pear and to eat it down to its core. Post a photo or video to social media and use the hashtags #ctgrownforctkids and #applecrunch to be involved. Educational toolkits and more activities are available on the [Put Local On Your Tray](#) website.

“One of the best ways to reconnect to nature and healthy living is to consume foods grown in your own environment. Our bodies are designed to have that proximal relationship with our food,” said Herb Virgo, Founder and Executive Director of [Keney Park Sustainability Project](#). “CT Grown for CT Kids Week is a great way to educate students and their families on the importance of local food consumption while supporting the local economy.”

According to a [2015 USDA Farm to School Census](#), 70% of Connecticut schools surveyed participate in farm to school activities. They invested more than \$7.2 million in local food and 51% of the Connecticut districts surveyed planned to increase local food purchases in the future.

In 2016, the CT Farm to School Collaborative (F2S Collaborative) was convened. The F2S Collaborative is a multi-stakeholder partnership whose function is to pursue projects together that no one partner could do alone. Participating organizations represent the variety of stakeholders needed for collaborative work on Farm to School, including: Department of Agriculture, Department of Energy & Environmental Protection, UConn Extension, School Nutrition Association of CT, FoodCorps CT, New England Food & Dairy Council, Common Ground, and Hartford Food System.

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