

Colonial farmers markets become popular stops for summer eats



Herb Anderson brought his grandchildren to Eisenberg Elementary School's pop-up farmers market every day it was open this summer. The Colonial School District market helped Anderson care for his grandchildren and also exposed them to healthier eating while they were out of school, he said.

"My grandson had kale chips and I was shocked – he loved them," said Anderson. "It's something new he would have never tried had it not been for coming here."

The markets, held every Wednesday afternoon beginning mid-June through early August, offered Delaware students lunch at Eisenberg Elementary and McCullough Elementary schools. The meals were part of the federally funded Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) to help children in low-income areas across the state receive healthy food options while schools are out of session.

SFSP is operated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and managed locally by the Delaware Department of Education. The program has 328 approved sites for food distribution across the state. Traditionally, SFSP invites families to grab food in school cafeterias, but SFSP also now offers alternatives like mobile meals, food art, edible education, and farmers markets.

“Children must have multiple opportunities to meet their nutritional needs during the summer so they can continue to learn and grow,” said Secretary of Education Susan Bunting. “Summer food programs also support districts and charter schools as they continue to engage families and make certain students are ready to learn when they return to school in the fall.”

For Colonial School District, which served over 30,000 meals this summer, the markets also offer a way for their agricultural program and nutrition services to work together as they provide area families with healthy food options. William Penn High School’s Penn Farm Agricultural Program supplies the produce for the farmers markets.

“This has definitely been a joint effort between our agriculture teachers and nutrition services,” said Colonial’s Supervisor of Nutrition Services Paula Angelucci. “It’s been a labor of love that would not have been successful without a lot of people helping out.”

Penn Farm offers students an opportunity to grow, harvest, and distribute their own food. Students work on the farm twice a week for three hours at a time. According to Angelucci and Colonial’s Nutrition Outreach Specialist, Scott Schuster, the Penn Farm also offers students a chance to engage in science classes that align with the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). The program is popular – there is currently a 250-student waiting list.

Earlier this year, Penn Farm was the first agricultural program to receive a Superstar in Education award from the DuPont Center for Philanthropy and Education, giving the farm \$5,000 to buy a wildflower garden with bee aviary, pollination area and an outdoor

classroom. The award also helped William Penn H.S. purchase an aquaponics greenhouse that generates energy from tilapia fish and their waste. Students use the greenhouse to learn more about harnessing energy and about tilapia healthcare, ensuring the fish are alive and healthy.

"We to continue to learn daily. I never thought there would one day be a chicken coop next to our football field!" said Angelucci.

In 2017, over 10,000 pounds of food was harvested and distributed from the Penn Farm to Delaware students and families through SFSP programs like the Colonial farmers markets.

Angelucci and Schuster said they believe the Colonial farmers markets were such a success that they'll continue to grow next year with more open dates and times for families.

"Ensuring that every child has access to nutritious meals is a moral obligation that also supports the most urgent, practical goals we have for our state - for student engagement and achievement, for public health, and for a vibrant economy driven by a strong workforce," said First Lady Tracey Quillen Carney, who continues to promote student access to healthy meals throughout Delaware.

Anyone interested in touring Penn Farm can visit www.Colonialschooldistrict.org/farm/ or contact Toby Hagerott at (302) 323-2800 x.4406. For more information on SFSP, visit <http://www.doe.k12.de.us/summermealsDE>.