

From the farm to the cafeteria



Rikki Van Camp/Messenger Post

Dan White holds up some of the asparagus sold at White's Farm Market in East Bloomfield. White's sells some produce directly to schools, making it easier to get fresh food on the cafeteria line.

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Canandaigua, N.Y. —

Strawberries picked from a field in Clifton Springs or Penn Yan at daybreak may wind up, just a few hours later, in the fruit salad served up to kids in the Bloomfield and Victor school cafeterias this month.

The two school districts are taking part in the annual Spring Harvest program. Run by Deborah Muntner [of Seeking Common Ground], the program pairs institutions with farmers in several counties — including Ontario and Yates — to provide locally grown, fresh produce. It was started last year.

“We wanted to find a way to bring the farms to the cafeteria,” Muntner said. “Our goal was to bring local food to schools.”

Bloomfield cafeteria manager Todd Fowler signed on after hearing about the program last year.

“It’s nutritious and it’s fresh,” Fowler said. In the last year, he said, the district got everything from strawberries and asparagus in the summer to winter squash in the fall.

Fowler said the district has been able to save money because it buys produce straight from the farms instead of vendors.

“We were previously getting our produce from various distributors around the state,” Fowler said. “But it was not county

local, just state local.”

The two schools districts were among seven institutions that took part the first year. The list includes the Ferris Hills senior living community, the Ontario County nursing home and Clark Meadows Assisted Living, said Muntner said. She hopes to gain even more participants this year.

“We want to promote local foods at a lower price,” she said. “During this time of year, many things can be expensive.”

Chip White, a sixth generation owner of White’s Farm Market just south of Ionia, thought the idea of promoting fresh produce in the area was valuable.

“We supplied items like cantaloupe, watermelon and corn last year,” White said. “We already planted the asparagus and strawberries for this year, which we will supply to Victor and Bloomfield schools.”

Once the institutions sign up for the program, they are given a list of fruits and vegetables available from local farmers. The prices depend upon how much produce is available.

Janet Elman, cafeteria manager for the Victor Central School District, tries to use as much of the products as possible.

“Last year we had fresh corn on the cob,” she said. “It was great.”

Seeking Common Ground’s Fingerlakes Farm-to-Cafeteria program is currently funded by Northeast SARE and the F.F. Thompson Foundation.