

# Farm-to-cafeteria program growing

Over the past five years the movement to bring fresh, local produce and food products into local cafeterias and restaurants has been gathering steam in our area.

While some people call it "Farm to School," the movement is, in fact, much broader and extends to all institutional public cafeterias. Farm to Cafeteria covers all the facilities that are serving large numbers of people, outside of restaurants, like nursing homes, assisted living facilities, schools, colleges, camps and hospitals.

Use of local produce in public cafeterias provides a direct market for growers and farmers in the region and does not require long-distance transportation, making Farm to Cafeteria an important contributor to energy conservation.

Farm to Cafeteria creates a win-win for everyone — great-tasting, nutritious food that supports the local community and its agriculture industry.

The goals of Farm to Cafeteria include introducing more produce into local schools, hospitals and cafeterias and dining halls. In Ontario County, Deborah Denome, director of Seeking Common Ground, started her work in Farm to Cafeteria by introducing local foods at St. Mary's School in Canandaigua for the children's lunches.

After those events, outreach to cafeterias in the Canandaigua Food Shed was



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increased through personal interviews, publicity, and a kickoff breakfast in 2006 for cafeteria managers. School cafeteria staffers in Bloomfield, Victor and Geneva were all early leaders in this movement.

An advisory group assembled by Deborah Denome with local farmers, Cornell Cooperative Extension staff and cafeteria managers has continued to meet regularly to get the word out and assist cafeterias in making the shift to local produce.

Progress has been made, with many more cafeterias utilizing fresh, local produce in their menus. Most schools in Ontario County and several adult living facilities now have in-season, fresh produce in their food plans. Growers and farmers in the region have familiarized themselves with these venues and their needs and have set up supply lines. The Cornell Cooperative Extension of Ontario County's Web site, [www.cceontario.org](http://www.cceontario.org), has information on growers and their products.

As the popularity of this movement grows, cafeteria staff looks for ways to overcome barriers to bringing fresh, local products into the meals they serve.

Cooking meals for large numbers of people requires a high degree of efficiency in purchasing, preparation and serving, so it is often easier to buy from large regional distributors who know the quantities and preparation processes for the institutions that they work with. Cafeteria managers also need to know when certain types of produce are in season and how they can easily access that produce. There are also budget considerations.

Sometimes fresh food means higher cost in increased labor time to wash, cut and store the items. In addition, the utensils and cooking gear may not be available because of the long-term dependence that cafeterias have on prepackaged goods.

This month, the Farm to Cafeteria sponsors the second annual Spring Harvest Day with the actual date set based on strawberry availability. Finger Lakes Region cafeterias will highlight the tasty, local strawberries that abound in our region, and all cafeterias are welcome to participate.

Strawberry ordering information will be provided, as well as posters and fliers upon request. For more information, contact Deborah Muntner at (585) 393-9073 or [dmuntner@hotmail.com](mailto:dmuntner@hotmail.com).

For more information on Farm to Cafeteria in Ontario County, go to [www.seeking-commonground.org](http://www.seeking-commonground.org) and add [info@seekingcommonground.org](mailto:info@seekingcommonground.org).