



Beyond the Local Food Event: Conversations with Teacher Champions Minutes from Webinar on June 10, 2015

See the full webinar recap at sustainontario.com/?p=27334

INTRODUCTIONS

Coreen Jones from Ecosource, Peel Region

What is Ecosource? An environmental non profit organization specializing in environmental education in schools and community members

Jody Mitchell from Roots To Harvest, Thunder Bay

What is Roots To Harvest? A non profit organization working with teachers and cafeteria managers and farmers, to connect young people with food. Also do youth employee training around food growing.

The Topic Question

How do we bring together school and food in a meaningful way at the high school level?

Poll: Who is participating today?

- majority of the callers are the from health units
- some teachers
- some student nutrition programs
- some community organizations
- 9% other

AGENDA (full detail on slides)

- Alternative Avenues project - Durham, Peel, Thunder Bay
- food literacy + access to local healthy food - common language of what we mean - taken from the Ontario Edible Education Network
- food procurement and food literacy work together - in a school context nested in a larger community food system

Overview of the Alternative Avenues project

- Roots To Harvest and Ecosource are collaborating on this research project funded by the OMAFRA Local Food Fund and the Greenbelt Fund
- Focus on school food programs: hospitality courses, family studies class, food and nutrition programs (breakfast club/snack club)
- Three areas:

1. Research - challenges and opportunities associated with local food in schools
2. Engaging student and teachers in food literacy
3. Piloting different local food procurement projects in schools

Defining Food Literacy and Local Food Connections

- The knowledge and understanding of:
 - where food comes from
 - impact on health, environment, economy
 - who to grow, prepare and prefer healthy, safe and nutritious foods
- Successful projects do more than bring the food into the schools. You need to bring the students on board and get them into get into the food
- Finding: **we can't have food literacy piece without working with local food and procuring it in the schools**
- if you try to bring local food in into the cafe and the class without that food literacy piece, something is missing and it won't work
- the projects really rely on student involvement + engagement
- it would be near impossible to do one without the other
- will discuss more in the upcoming webinar: late August/early September

Nancy White - Superior SCVI in Thunder Bay – Food and Nutrition teacher

- 3 main projects that we've been working on:
 - 1) Farm to Caf – working with Roots to Harvest and school cafeteria staff to include locally grown produce. Nancy's class takes part in preparing the food and has the benefit of learning the techniques. This project has been going on for over a year.
 - 2) Garden project - green house building and garden plots run with a coop feature - the kids own a bed, plan the garden. Developing a learning binder resource with students.
 - Nancy comments that she doesn't garden at home, so this is a learning curve for her, learning *with* her students
 - 3) Harvesting - kids can harvest their crops and they run a buffet from it. The kids planned the meals, the shopping, etc
 - What isn't used right away they are learning to preserve

Mark Williamson – Henry Street Secondary School in Whitby - Culinary Arts teacher

- He's been trying to bring local food initiatives into the school for his specialized major class. He started with a CSA box, now he gets two boxes once a month
- Awarded some grants from TD Friends of the Environment and was able to put up a green house, to get plants started a few months early to get vegetables on the table before the school yard ends

- Started working with Chartwells, the cafeteria food service provider, to partner with them and have a couple days where they use their grown produce and showcase it

QUESTION AND ANSWER

1. What drives this work? As a teacher why is this important to you?

Nancy: I'm a bit of a health nut, huge advocate for healthy lifestyle and passionate about food, so the link for me between healthy lifestyle and food is a no brainer.

Mark: I agree that health is a holistic approach. The culinary arts is a good place to embed some good habits - learning about sustainability as well, and other issues (GMOs vs organic), trying to reach most of the big issues

2. Physically and literally how is local food getting into your school? How is it grown? How is it brought into the classroom and kitchens?

Nancy: Commenting on the seasons, it's hard to do a farm-to-caf in the winter. In her classroom there are a number of freezers (thanks to grants) and therefore they are able to preserve a lot of food. Also collaborative work with other high schools and Roots To Harvest allows food to be shared. There is also a local supplier, yet it's still hard to get local food all winter. There are also issues with amount (i.e. having to order a minimum amount). Having a food relationship with the cafeteria manager as a potential way to address that. It is a challenge though.

Mark: CSA boxes are a good quantity of food, and having farmers market nearby is convenient, so the class can go over there sometimes too. Also being in touch with Ecosource let us plan a field trip to the farm they get the CSA box from.

3. How do you pay for the CSA box?

Mark: He runs a specialized high skills major, an initiative that showcases technical courses within high schools. For this major, he has a purchase card/account, which he used. If he didn't have it, it would go to the department head that has the purchase card.

4. What roadblock or challenges have you come up against? How did you move beyond them?

Nancy: She teaches food and nutrition all day long, many students are applied level kids, special needs, etc. interesting venture - attendance sometimes is an issue - you can't depend on who is reregistered to attend. The climate makes things difficult as well.

Roots To Harvest: We hope with this project, that it gets the kids that won't always show up. May not always get everyone but at least some are showing up. Talked about readjusting success criteria, and look at the ones that do show up and get engaged. Also a way of upping

levels in engagement through responsibility, if the kids have to prepare meals for the school it's no longer just about skipping classes it means there will be no food for their peers.

Mark: When he gets the CSA boxes, he doesn't know what he's getting. The challenge is designing a menu and being creative. The kids often come up with ideas as well. At first he thought it would be a hindrance, but no problems.

He was worried about liability if a kid would get sick - but schools are well insured for those purposes.

There were concerns about the soil - but it's come together nicely. Currently importing soil in from a local source.

Attendance is also an issue for him. As technical courses; they are not always the most well attended classes in general.

One of the biggest obstacles was the strike, which threw off the green house. Yet luckily the custodian took care of all the plants, and helped a lot with the whole program during this time.

5.a) Regarding scheduling, you had to have a discussion with the farm (CSA) for the exam period and harvest period as you can't always receive the boxes. How do you deal with that?

Mark: There were a few scheduling conflicts, yet the farm has been great and postponing it and putting a box together when we were available. They are a small operation and work around us

b) How much does the box cost? And what budget does it come from?

Mark: \$23/box - 50 for 2, \$6 delivery charge = 60\$ for the boxes. The money comes from a program and the block account for the program, mostly the specialist high school majors – an initiative by the government.

6. How do you embed your projects or get support across the broader school community? In what way is the whole school community involved in the project? What is the strategy? Advice?

Mark: With the tech program, he is close to other tech teachers. The construction class put together the green house. The environment club helped with the planting, a workplace program for kids with learning disabilities and they helped out with a lot of the planting. Showcasing the CSA boxes with the lunches to other teachers help too. For the students they have snacks and handed them out after school. The breakfast club at the school also enjoyed some of the ingredients. In September, he is hoping that partnership with Chartwells will reach the rest of the school body.

He also has signage outside of the courtyard to explain what is going on in the courtyard.

He also received another grant that allowed for a pollinator and native plant garden (some of which is edible). He is hoping to get tables out in the courtyard area so students can spend time in the area.

7. Many people on the call are from outside the school system. How can community organizations and health units support you in this work? In what ways, what resources or approaches can be offered to get more teachers involved in these types of activities?

Nancy: With the grant we received we partnered with the Thunder Bay Public Health Unit and health inspectors came into the class to teach the kids the food safety curriculum. The students were tested and passed and got their certificate.

Grants aren't sustainable, so in the future she is unsure what will happen to this initiative. She is trying to work with the health unit to get a reduced fee or work out the cost factor to do this in future.

She noted that when professionals come into the classroom and share the expertise the students really seem to appreciate that. The retention of knowledge and attendance is higher.

There's potential to have kids do co-ops with a local farm, or a local food distributor, or with restaurants.

Roots To Harvest's strategy is to try to work with same classes and teachers over and over to build up those relationships.

Mark: He connected with the public health department to look at the area and see how to make it a healthy and safe place to grow vegetables. At his school they also run a food handling certification program, that focuses on the food safety aspect.

The local food markets have been beneficial too.

8. How did your students respond to these kinds of programs?

Mark: Students have difficulties at first getting their hands dirty in the soil, grumbling at first but then they quite like it generally speaking.

His class also runs Taste-Offs. They do a CSA vs grocery store taste test and the kids realize quickly the differences between the two products.

When they have the grown vegetables, you can see the change. They pay a lot more attention and are more interested in the lesson.

Regarding the class trip to the farm with Ecosource, the students commented on how cool it was to grow food, and also that they didn't realize how much work it was to grow food.

That field trip was monumental to a lot of kids, and say it was the best field trip they've ever had.

9. What measures are in place to keep these programs in place? Are they sustainable?

Mark: He's moving to a new school, so it he's thought a lot about how to make the project sustainable. He suggested a number ways: get a coop student in the class to be the lead; assemble a binder with Ecosource materials and resources to help keep this initiative going (how to garden, etc.); and it would be beneficial to have a peer helper to support growing in the green house.

There's still the need for someone to check in on the garden in the summer.

He's developed signage and a map of the courtyard - so that those who come next will have an idea of what's growing where.

Building relationships is essential: the environment club, as well as 2 or 3 other teachers, have stepped up and they will continue on making it happen

Jody: The sustainability of the project in Thunder Bay needs to be looked at in terms of short, medium + long term sustainability.

The relationship piece - involving different levels of kids and teachers – grows the community that's more invested in the food project. That makes the system more resilient and adaptable. Day cares and churches nearby can be part of the garden as well.

They are working to hire part-time high school students through the summer to maintain the garden. They are also looking for other ways to tend the gardens through the summer beyond their current grant.

QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

10. How did you connect with Ecosource, Roots to Harvest, and the Ontario Edible Education Network? Who united the projects in schools? How much funding do you have? And how did you get your schools on board?

Mark: In Durham there are a number of culinary arts programs and all the teachers know each other through professional development. A college put him in touch with Ecosource which got the ball rolling. In terms of staff, he tries not to ask too many questions and hasn't come up against too many roadblocks so far. It helps that he pursued the grant himself, and kept the administration in the loop but didn't involve them too much

Nancy: Roots To Harvest contacted teachers to see who's on board, and through the conversation can see where the interest and energy is. You can't just helicopter in a project – you need to find those synergies.

On finding administration's support, normally they are already on board. In this case, they had board member strategically come visit the program when a guest speaker was coming in. and they got to witness really high levels of involvement from students who normally don't cook. Figuring out people's criteria for success is key to getting support for the program.

11. We're interested in the dandelion recipe that was mentioned to take advantage of the natural growth. What are new unique fruits and vegetables have you introduced?

Roots To Harvest: We teach lessons about dandelions and their importance to bees, so there's a good food literacy lesson there. The dandelion fritters are interesting and different and the kids

got to choose their own spices for the batter. There's lots of information online, and we can share some of those labs.

Another way to do it: hide vegetable in food have them try it then be like "there is a vegetable in here!" Beet-chocolate cake is a real hit.

Mark: Seasonal potato pancakes, you can throw anything in there – carrots, sweet potato.

Quinoa salads have been really successful too. The celeriac mash was also a real hit. The kids say the root vegetable looks like an alien brain, so it was memorable. The recipes are online.

Watch the recording and access the slides at sustainontario.com/?p=27334