

## PRESS RELEASE

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### October is Farm to School Month!

SULLIVAN COUNTY, NY— October is National Farm to School Month. For four weeks, millions of schools, families, and communities around the country celebrate the movement that connects children to fresh, healthy food and supports local agricultural economies; Sullivan County is no exception!

In Sullivan County, school buildings in every district, led by Sullivan BOCES, host special events and activities highlighting agriculture and fresh farm foods in a variety of ways. Supporting district efforts is a consortium of community organizations including Cornell Cooperative Extension Sullivan County (CCESC), Sullivan Renaissance, Sullivan County Public Health Services, New Hope Community, Boys and Girls Club, SUNY Sullivan, and Catskill Mountainkeeper.

Through funding, outreach, and educational workshops for students, teachers, and cafeteria staff, these partners are helping districts introduce students to farms and farmers' markets through field trips, taste testing of interesting fruits and vegetables like pumpkin and ginger, what it takes to sow and grow food for an entire population, and even how to manage waste in school, at home, and on the farm.

With edible gardens or garden clubs in nearly every school district; compost programs; salad bars; horticulture, agriculture, and nutrition curriculum in the classroom and in afterschool programs; farm tours to Hope Farm at SUNY Sullivan, Apple Pond Farm, Willow Wisp Farm, and Stonewall Farms; urban gardening visits to Evergreen Community Garden; video showings from Beaverdam Brook Farms, Majestic Farm, and Somewhere in Time Farm; cooking demonstrations and Chef in the Classroom, Sullivan County's farm to school efforts have come a long way.

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Limited budgets, storage, equipment, staff training, food safety, and seasonal food availability provide a range of challenges to school districts' efforts to offer local, fresh food options on cafeteria trays. That's why, in Sullivan County, the community has come together to offer support to both school district faculty, and local farmers, in expanding and institutionalizing farm to school efforts across the county.

Farm to school programs are critical in so many ways to improving the health of Sullivan County's students and sustaining the region's agricultural economy. Increasing students' access to fresh fruits and vegetables sets them up to make healthful choices into adulthood, and also prepares them for learning in the school environment. In addition, with an annual agricultural economic impact exceeding \$120 million in Sullivan County, farm to school programs are raising a generation of youth who understand the importance of buying locally grown foods.

For school districts and producers that need help navigating the maze of federal regulations for school nutrition, and for parents interested in learning the benefits of supporting farm to school efforts in their local schools, the U.S. Department of Agricultural has a Farm to School web page full of resources, toolkits, grant programs, and contacts. The public can learn more at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool>.

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