



New York State Farm to School Highlight:

Finger Lakes Farm to Cafeteria Profile

History

Wood's Earth (WE) is a farm to school organization in Ithaca, NY focused on a systemic approach to engaging youth and community in school food through five integrated programs: School Food Production, The Living Classroom, Farm to School Hub, The Fresh Snack Program, and The Community Gardens. WE launched in January 2012 and in January of 2013 became a project partner of the Center for Transformative Action, 501c3.



WE works to bring local, fresh ingredients to Ithaca area school meals and snacks year-round, coordinating procurement from local, sustainable farms. WE also grows school food on its own two-acre learning farm, which has involved hundreds of local students of all ages in hands-on farm education through curriculum-integrated field trips and internships. The Ithaca City School District (ICSD) meal program serves lunch to 2,500 students during the school year and 700 students in the Summer Feeding Program. In the summer, WE teen interns process fresh produce they cultivated and harvested, preparing it for fresh summer meals and freezing it for school-year use in ICSD's central kitchen. As of fall 2014, WE is managing the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program for ICSD elementary schools and is supporting a pilot for central kitchen operations and expansion of the Snack Program to more schools.

WE is also working with school food personnel on a Fresh School Food Guide, with generous support from Sustainable Tompkins and volunteers. The guide features profiles of local produce arranged according to USDA school food dietary guidelines and ideas for raw use, cooked use, and preservation for each crop. Beginning in 2014, WE is offering more curriculum and Common Core-integrated field trips in partnership with the Buddy Up Program of Ithaca Public Education's Discovery Trail.

Partners

Purchasers

- **School Districts:** Child Nutrition Program, ICSD; New Roots Charter School in Ithaca, NY; Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program in ICSD elementary schools
- **Food Bank** of the Southern Tier's Backpack Program

Community

- **Distributors:** Regional Access





- **Youth Groups:** Conservation Corps, Greater Ithaca Activities Center (GIAC); The Learning Web; TST BOCES Work Experience Program; Youth Employment Services
- **Nonprofit:** Cool School Food Program, New York Coalition for Healthy School Food; Friendship Donations Network; Ithaca Public Education Initiative; Youth Farm Project

Producers

- Buried Treasures Farm
- Cornell Orchards
- Early Bird Farm
- Eddydale Farms
- Finger Lakes Organics
- Guernseyhill Maple Farm
- Kestrel Perch Berry Farm
- Muddy Fingers Farm
- Plowbreak Farm
- Remembrance Farm
- Sacred Seed Farm
- Stick and Stone Farm



Successes

Produce Grown: Having previously grown small quantities of a large variety of crops, WE now focuses on growing produce that is most useful to school food programs, not readily available to procure in sufficient quantities from other farms, less resource-intensive, and that generates revenue: lettuce (for salads), tomatoes (fresh and for sauces), basil (for pesto), winter squash, and summer squash. WE quadrupled its basil production between 2013 and 2014 and with summer interns processes the following: makes and freezes pesto and tomato sauce; blanches and freezes summer squash, swiss chard, kale, and herbs.

Procurement: WE has coordinated sales of thousands of pounds of produce from local, sustainable farms to the Ithaca City School District (ICSD) lunch program, including carrots and acorn squash. The WE learning farm has also grown and sold thousands of pounds of organic produce for school food. In fall 2013, WE began to broker sales of local produce from area farms, facilitating biweekly winter carrot deliveries to ICSD’s central kitchen for two months and 1,500 pounds of acorn squash. WE’s list of local farms partners is ever-expanding.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

While WE’s farmer partners would love for more children in the community to eat fresh, local produce, they cannot sell their food for the industrial food prices that schools pay (often a quarter of the price that local farmers would typically charge for their food), both in practice and in principle. Though WE was originally open to facilitating small volume and infrequent purchases of locally grown produce, area farmers are understandably unwilling to compromise their farms’ integrity with such drastic price cuts for quality products.

Open conversations with local producers led to development of mutual trust, and WE eventually decided to only approach farmers for procurement when it would benefit their farms, refraining from requests for “school food charity.” The current dynamic between WE, local farmers, and the ICSD central kitchen is to seek out occasions when a middle price point can be found, for instance when there is bulk surplus or broken root crops. As a result, WE is building sustainable school food relationships with strong farms, and our local farmers’ assumptions about the devaluing of farms by the school food system are being revisited.

