

Oct 26, 2011 – Port Townsend Leader

Farm to School training draws participants from all over the Olympic Peninsula.

On a beautiful fall day, nearly 30 school nutrition staff, farmers and community members attended the WSDA (Washington State Dept. of Agriculture) Farm to School food service and farmer training held October 19th on the Olympic Peninsula. It was the most widely attended training event held in the state so far. Food service staff traveled from as far away as Olympia & Neah Bay to learn the benefits of Farm to Cafeteria programs.

The morning began with participants making their own school breakfast - fruit and yogurt parfaits - as if they were students, building parfaits with berries from Sequim's Graysmarsh Farms, vanilla yoghurt and granola.

Designed to introduce participants to the realities of operations on farms and in school meal programs, the group toured farms and had hands-on cooking time in a school kitchen. While visiting Nash's Organic Farms and Graysmarsh Farm, participants learned about their operations as they harvested berries, kale, cabbage and basil. They were served a delicious and hearty school lunch using local foods prepared by Dave Long, of Oven Spoonful, formerly a vocational teacher of culinary arts at Port Angeles school district. Long eloquently described the dishes, how they were prepared and the various local ingredients used.

While returning to the Port Angeles school cafeteria, farmers and food service staff shared successes proudly and challenges candidly while strategizing ways to make progress in farm to school efforts. They agreed that feeding students well was a shared goal for all.

Kathy Crowley, Port Angeles Food Service Director, and staff led the Olympic Peninsula food service guided participants through a hands-on training in preparing a USDA approved reimbursable school meal using local foods. They worked together as a team preparing roasted vegetables, including local potatoes, onions, beets, squash and garlic. They chopped fresh local vegetables for a stir-fry using some local vegetables & commodity chicken and experimented with kale chips from kale harvested that morning from Nash's Organic Farm. They also created fresh salsa that the kids love. . Crowley explained that the kids will eat anything they see prepared in front of them, which they experience often at the omelet bar and with stir fry dishes prepared on the spot in the cafeteria in Port Angeles. The wonderful aroma and

fresh, colorful foods prepared before them tempts even the fussiest eaters.

Veda Wilson, head cook at Quilcene School District spoke proudly of her vocational students who bake fresh rolls and buns, make meals using Short Family Farm's grass fed beef and salad bar that incorporates school garden grown vegetables.

WA State Dept of Corrections procurement director, Julie Vanneste, who has been working with WSDA on a Farm-to-Prison pilot at two sites, and is extending the pilot to 13 correctional facilities was there to learn how to get going on the peninsula. The Clallam Bay Prison, which serves 2700 meals daily, has an inmate garden, is already buying some regional foods and wants to buy local. Sandi Diimmel of DOC said, "We have talked about this long enough, we are ready to do it now." Purchasing #2 carrots and other vegetables could fit within their budget since they are being chopped for cooking anyway. They talked about how the inmates love getting the fresh foods from the farms and devour it in no time. It tastes so much better than food stored for months in cold storage and shipped long distances they reported.

Port Townsend and Chimacum schools food service director, Mark Sperrazza, and three Port Townsend and one Chimacum food service staff attended the event as well. Sperrazza said he purchases produce from Red Dog Farm and offered an organic salad bar the first two weeks of school at Grant Street Elementary in Port Townsend. In addition to talking about the nuts and bolts of making farm-to-school connections, the group discussed the benefits of promoting the local foods ahead of time and conducting taste tests with students before the foods appear in the meals. Not only is it a learning opportunity in nutrition, cultural history, culinary arts and horticulture but parents, students and teachers are more likely to eat the new foods if they learn about it in advance. Food service attendees served up the delicious and colorful school meal they had prepared to the entire group as the event wrapped up. Smiles and applause filled the room as the appreciative crowd devoured the meal.