

Cooperative Extension



Do Family Meals Still Matter?

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Surveys show parents think family meals are important, but they aren't having them as often as they'd like. Why are fewer families eating regular family meals than in years past? Some people say they do not have the time or the energy to prepare a family meal. Other reasons are:

- Both parents working
- Conflicting schedules
- Long work hours
- Many meetings and kids' practices for sports and music
- Parents don't know how to cook

What happens instead of sitting down together for a family meal?

- Families eat microwave dinners often in front of the TV
- Fast foods and drive-thru eating
- Fill up on snack foods
- Family members grab what they want, and eat when and where they want

Do family meals really matter? Yes, they do! Studies show that mealtime conversation around the dinner table helps increase a child's vocabulary and this leads to better readers. Better readers do better in all subjects. Family meals help to strengthen families because it is a time for dialogue and sharing. They encourage a sense of belonging. Family meals help improve family communication. "What was your favorite part of the day?" is a question that can start table talk. Mealtime is a perfect time for children to learn social skills, manners, and how to have pleasant

conversations. Parents need to set a good example. Use family meal time to teach children to take turns and be good listeners. Children learn by watching others at meal time and all adults need to model healthy eating. **When families eat together, families eat better.** Family meals can also promote healthier food choices.

How can you bring back family mealtimes? Follow these tips:

1. **Make mealtimes a priority.** To make mealtime work, it has to be a priority for *everyone*. If everyone can't make it for dinner, then eat breakfast together.
2. **Have a plan.** Know everyone's schedule; write down a menu; keep foods on hand that can be easily prepared, shop ahead of time, and use convenience foods wisely. For example, packaged salads save time, but they cost more. The whole family needs to be involved in getting the meal on the table. Share the responsibility. Pitch in and help. Even little ones can set out the napkins and spoons.
3. **The menu doesn't have to include a home cooked meal.** The meal could be simple like sandwiches from the deli with a fresh tossed salad and low-fat milk. Order from your favorite take-out restaurant. Some families like to eat "breakfast" for dinner.

For example, prepare pancakes topped with your favorite fresh fruit. Use your imagination and be creative with meal planning and preparation. Being together is what counts!

4. **Build a positive feeling at the table.** Focus on each other. Turn off the TV, phones, and radio so there are no distractions. Use this time to come together.
5. **Family Day - A Day to Eat Dinner with Your Children™** is a national movement to remind parents that Dinner Makes a Difference! Family Day informs parents that the parental

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Grilling with Safety in Mind

Sherri Cirignano, M.S., RD, LDN, Family & Community Health Sciences Educator,
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Before heading out for the grill this year, take a moment to refresh your memory, and maybe even learn something new, about grilling with safety in mind. Although grilling is a great way to enjoy the great outdoors while preparing a meal, it also creates opportunities for bacteria to form on foods. Evidence suggests that cooking certain foods at high temperatures may result in health risks. Taking the following simple precautions can help to keep you and your family safe while grilling this summer:



- Transport cold food home in a cooler with ice packs
- Refrigerate within 2 hours when the outdoor temperature is below 90° F
- Refrigerate within 1 hour when the outdoor temperature is above 90° F
- Keep cold foods at 41° F or below until it is time to place them on the grill
- Defrost meat, fish or poultry in the refrigerator on a plate to catch any drippings

Cook meat, fish and poultry to the following safe internal temperatures to destroy harmful bacteria:

Once food has reached a safe minimum internal temperature and is removed from the grill:

USDA Recommended Safe Internal Temperatures

Fish:	145° F
Steaks & Roasts:	145° F
Ground Beef:	160° F
Pork:	160° F
Poultry:	165° F

- Keep food hot at 135° F or above until served
- Place on a clean platter, being sure to not place it on the plate that held the raw meat, poultry or fish
- Refrigerate cooked items within 2 hours in mild weather
- Refrigerate cooked items within 1 hour when the outside temperature is at 90° F or above

Grilling on high heat is also responsible for flare-ups that can cause the outside of food to become charred. Some studies suggest that there may be a cancer risk when protein foods such as meats, poultry or fish are cooked at high temperatures. As a result, experts recommend that we eat grilled protein foods in moderation and avoid charred protein foods. Some tips to decrease charring include:

- Marinating protein foods before grilling and turning them frequently to reduce the production of cancer-causing substances
- Reducing flare-ups by spreading aluminum foil on the grill, making small holes in the foil to allow fat to drain
- Pre-cooking protein foods before grilling to shorten grilling time
- Grilling more vegetables and fruits is always a good choice since charring on those items do not pose the same health risk

The above tips can help you and your family enjoy a safe grilling season. For more information download our fact sheet Grilling With Care at <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/health/> or visit the following websites: www.aicr.org/ and www.fsis.usda.gov/

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Do Family Meals Still Matter?

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interaction fostered during frequent family dinners is an effective tool to help keep America's kids substance free. More than a decade of research by *The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University* has consistently found that the more often kids eat dinner with their families, the less likely they are to smoke, drink, or use drugs.

Join parents all across America in taking the Family Day STAR pledge, log on to www.CASAFamilyDay.org.

Celebrate your family on *Family Day* on Monday, September 28, 2009!

Cooking Healthy with a Slow Cooker

Maria C. Young, M.S., Family and Community Health Sciences Educator, Passaic County



Whether you call it a crock pot (where heat comes from all around the insert), or a slow cooker (where heat comes from underneath), one element remains the same. Food cooks faster and more evenly with minimal effort.

A delicious meal can be prepared while you are at work and be ready to serve your hungry family when you arrive home. Meals prepared in a crock pot save time and money, while improving the nutritional content of your meals.

Most slow cookers have two settings, low is about 200° F and high, about 300° F. Heat elements along the sides of the appliance directly heat the food. Lengthy cooking time and steam created within the tightly covered pot cooks the food and increases the temperature quickly enough to kill bacteria.

To test a slow cooker for safety, fill it one-half to two-thirds full of tap water. Heat the cooker on a low setting for 8 hours with the lid on. Check the water temperature with an accurate food thermometer. Do this quickly as the temperature drops 10-15 degrees when the lid is raised or removed. The temperature of the water should be 185°F. Temperatures below this indicate the slow cooker does not heat food to a high enough temperature or fast enough to avoid food safety problems. The slow cooker should be considered unsafe and be replaced.

Be sure to follow proper food safety practices when preparing your foods for the crock-pot. Here are tips to follow:

- **Wash hands** thoroughly before you start preparing foods to be cooked.
- **Make sure the surfaces** used to prepare and chop meats and vegetables are clean and sanitized. Utensils should be clean.
- **Inspect the inside** of the crock-pot before adding foods. A pot that has chips, cracks or breaks should not be used.
- **Within four hours of cooking**, the food inside the slow cooker should reach 140°F (or higher).
- **Keep perishable foods refrigerated** until preparation time to assure that bacteria will not multiply.
- **Meat and vegetables prepared in advance** should be stored separately in the refrigerator.
- **Thaw frozen meat; poultry and other ingredients** in the refrigerator while preparing food for the slow cooker.
- **Cut meat, poultry** and other vegetables into medium size, uniform pieces to ensure rapid heat transfer.
- **Preheat the crock-pot** or cook on the highest setting for the first hour, then turn to a lower setting. This is especially recommended when cooking meat or poultry in a slow cooker. Since vegetables cook the slowest, put them nearest the heat, at the bottom and sides of the pot.
- **Be careful not to overload the crock-pot.** Fill only to a minimum of 1/2 full to a maximum of 2/3 full.
- **Do not lift the lid during cooking** as this will “drop” the temperature 10-15 degrees and slow the cooking process.
- **Before sampling the food**, be sure to check the temperature to make sure it has reached a safe internal temperature to destroy bacteria. Use an accurate food thermometer to test food doneness – poultry 180°F, pork 170°F, and beef 160°F.
- **Do not leave cooked food to cool down in the crock-pot.** Either eat it immediately or store leftovers in shallow containers and refrigerate as soon as possible.
- **Leftovers** should never be reheated in the crock-pot.

For further information on this and other health and physical activity topics, please visit our website – www.getmovinggethealthy.rutgers.edu.

References: Peterson-Vangness, Glenyce. Slow Cooker Food Safety. Retrieved from: www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/nutrition/M1182.html



Tangy Beef Stew

Serves 4

Prep 10 minutes, 4 hours on HIGH or 6 hours on LOW

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| 1 large onion, cut into 1-inch pieces | 2 cups water |
| 1 lb. boneless beef chuck, cut into 1-inch cubes | 2 tbsp. red wine vinegar |
| 1 tbsp. ground ginger | 1/4 cup raisins |
| 1/4 teaspoon salt | 1/4 teaspoon black pepper |
| 3 medium-size carrots, peeled and cut into 1-inch chunk | 2 tablespoons corn starch |
| 2 large celery stalks, cut into 1" slices | Cooked egg noodles (optional) |
| | 1 large beef bouillon cube |

1. Layer onions, beef, ginger, salt, carrots and celery in slow cooker bowl. Add bouillon cube, water, vinegar and raisins. Cover and cook on HIGH for 4 hours or LOW for 6 hours or until beef is very tender.

2. Remove cover and stir in black pepper. Using a ladle, remove 3 tablespoons liquid from slow cooker and place in a small bowl. Whisk in cornstarch. Pour cornstarch mixture into slow cooker; whisk to combine. Stir until liquid has thickened. Serve with noodles, if desired.

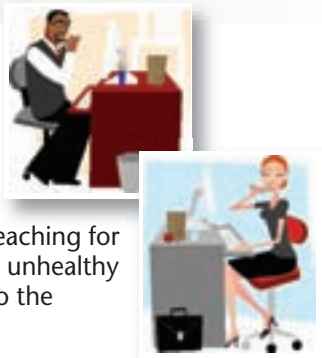
Per serving: 250 calories; 5 g fat (2 g sat.); 27 g protein; 24 g carbohydrate; 3 g fiber; 653 mg. sodium; 50 mg. cholesterol.

Source: Family Circle Magazine, September 2008

Eating Healthy While on the Job

Joanne Kinsey, M.S., Family & Community Health Sciences Educator, Atlantic & Ocean Counties

How many times have you felt hungry while at work and reached for the nearest vending machine to satisfy that hunger? Most vending machines are loaded with high fat, high sodium, and high sugar foods. Reaching for these foods on a regular basis can add unhealthy weight to the body and extra inches to the waistline.



When thinking about a mid-morning snack, reach for a food that is easy to eat, such as a piece of seasonal fruit. Bananas, pears, peaches, or apples will help to re-energize your morning. A handful of dried fruit combinations, of raisins, cranberries, and blueberries make a simple snack that can easily be kept in a plastic bag at your desk. Keep a bottle of water nearby as you work rather than reaching for a sweetened soft drink.

Lunch provides a break from the workday, and it is also an opportunity to refresh your energy level for the remainder of the afternoon. A balanced mid-day meal includes a tasty protein food, vegetables and fruit. It is worth your time to pack a nutritious lunch that can save you money too. When planning lunch consider using whole grain wraps, tortillas and breads to enhance your meal. Fill your sandwich with colorful vegetables like fresh spinach, sliced tomatoes, red pepper rings or cucumber slices. When selecting meats choose lean, low-sodium turkey or chicken. Steer clear of sweetened drinks with lunch by making water your beverage of choice.

Low-fat cottage cheese or yogurt make a quick and easy lunch or snack when paired with chunks of fresh fruit and a sprinkle of crunchy granola sprinkled on top. If you have access to a microwave oven you might want to try a package of steamer vegetables or simply pop in a scrubbed sweet potato for 3 to 4 minutes. Heating up a serving of hearty homemade soup or purchasing low-sodium minestrone, bean or vegetable soup makes a simple lunch. If you are purchasing frozen prepared lunch entrees look for low-sodium, low-fat options for maximum health benefit.

Feeling sluggish while working in the afternoon? Choose a snack of fresh fruit or crunchy vegetables to wake up your senses and add extra fiber to your diet. Pack a plastic container or bag with broccoli pieces, red and green pepper slices, cucumber, fresh green beans, cherry tomatoes, baby carrots, snow peas or celery sticks. A good source of protein can be added to your day with a handful of unsalted walnuts or almonds, or a small container of low-fat yogurt. A combination of dried fruit, unsalted pumpkin or sunflower seeds, makes a quick snack that can be eaten while sitting at a desk.

Eating healthy while on the job can be nutritious with some simple planning and a list while shopping for groceries. Add your favorite fresh and dried fruit, vegetables, and other healthy snacks to the list for quick additions to your briefcase. Save a serving of homemade soups and salads served at dinner and you will be ready for a quick and easy lunch the following day.

Web Watch: Local Farms/Healthy Kids

Luanne Hughes, M.S., RD Family & Community Health Sciences Educator, Gloucester County



"Local Farms/Healthy Kids," or the concept that bringing locally grown food into the school cafeteria, is a movement that's gaining momentum both nationally and here in New Jersey. Called "Farm to School" or "Farm to Cafeteria," these programs create a partnership between local farmers and community institutions -- to everyone's benefit. Farmers benefit from increased business; the community benefits from the dollars kept in the region; and the students benefit from the taste, freshness and nutrients of local produce. Learn more about Farm to School at these informative web sites:

The National Farm to School Network
www.farmtoschool.org

The Farm to School approach helps children understand where their food comes from and how their food choices impact their bodies, the environment and their communities at large. Farm to School brings healthy food from local farms to school children nationwide. The program teaches students about the path from farm to fork, and instills healthy eating habits that can last a lifetime. At the same time, use of local produce in school meals and educational activities provides a new direct market for farmers in the area and mitigates environmental impacts of transporting food long distances.

The National Farm to School Network sprouted from this desire to support community-based food systems, strengthen family farms and improve student health by reducing childhood obesity.

Eight regional lead agencies and national staff provide free training and technical assistance, information services, networking and support for policy, media and marketing activities. In addition to a wealth of resources, news and forums, that is a state-by-state directory with links to programs, projects and activities taking place in every state. Log on and check out what's going on in New Jersey!

Garden ABCs: The School Garden Share-Site
<http://gardenabcs.com>

Garden ABCs is a forum for parents, educators and community members seeking guidance, resources, fundraising, networking and teaching support to start and maintain learning gardens.

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Physical Activity for Adults

Karen Ensle Ed.D., RD, FADA, CFCS, Family and Community Health Sciences Educator, Union County

Physical activity is important for everyone including mature adults. Pick an activity that's easy to fit into your lifestyle and do it at least 10 minutes at one time.

- **Aerobic** activities will strengthen your heart and cardiovascular system. Walking briskly, dancing, or biking make your heart beat faster and your lungs and blood vessels stronger.
- **Strengthening** exercises are also necessary to keep your arms, legs, and internal muscles strong to support your body. They are a fun way to be with your family or friends and help improve your health.



How many times a week should you be physically active? It's up to you, but it is best to be active at least 3 days a week. Vary the types of activities you choose to do as they all work different muscle groups. Your muscles should feel worked but not sore. Then, you can trade activities at a moderate level for vigorous ones that take more effort, in the same week. Alternating activities is smart, and the healthy way to exercise.

Below are examples of moderate and vigorous activities. Do these for 10 minutes or more at a time.

Moderate Activities:

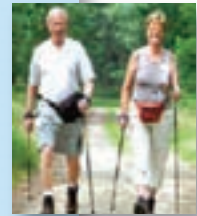
(I can talk while I do them, but I can't sing.)

- Ballroom and line dancing
- Biking on level ground or with few hills
- Canoeing
- General gardening (raking, trimming shrubs)
- Sports where you catch and throw (baseball, softball, volleyball)
- Tennis (doubles)
- Walking briskly
- Water aerobics

Vigorous Activities:

(I can only say a few words without stopping to catch my breath.)

- Aerobic dance
- Biking faster than 10 miles per hour
- Fast dancing
- Heavy gardening (digging, hoeing)
- Hiking uphill
- Jumping rope
- Martial arts (such as karate)
- Race walking, jogging, or running
- Sports with a lot of running (basketball, hockey, soccer)
- Swimming fast or swimming laps
- Tennis (singles)



Below are some guidelines for aerobic and strengthening activities:

Aerobic Activities

- If you choose activities at a **moderate** level, do at least **2 hours and 30 minutes** a week.
- If you choose **vigorous** activities, do at least **1 hour and 15 minutes** a week.
- Slowly build up the amount of time you do physical activities. The more time you spend, the more health benefits you gain. Aim for twice the amount of activity.
- Do at least 10 minutes at a time.
- You can combine moderate and vigorous activities.

Muscle Strengthening Activities

- Do these at least 2 days a week.
- Include all the major muscle groups such as legs, hips, back, chest, stomach, shoulders, and arms.
- Exercises for each muscle group should be repeated 8 to 12 times per session.



By alternating between aerobic and strengthening activities you are taking "small steps" to improve your health. And remember, any physical activity is better than none!

For more information, visit

<http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/factSheetAdults.aspx#top> and www.healthfinder.gov and type "activity" in the search box.



Energy Drinks: The Truth Behind the Boost

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Daryl Minch, M.Ed., CFCS, Family & Community Health Sciences Educator, Somerset County



If you find yourself with a busy schedule, stretched thin between school, work, family, and friends, and you seek extra energy, before you rush to buy the first energy drink you can find, consider what you are really buying.

What are “energy drinks”?

Energy drinks claim to give you extra energy. They come in a variety of brands and are sold at supermarkets, convenience stores, and in vending machines. Most often these drinks contain high amounts of caffeine, sugar, guarana, ginseng, and taurine. Caffeine is the main “boosting ingredient”.

Are energy drinks dangerous?

Energy drinks consumed in moderation are safe for adults. Experts agree that consuming 300 mg of caffeine (3 cups of coffee) per day is fine for adults. Although 1 serving of most energy drinks contains about the same caffeine as a cup of coffee (80 mg), having an entire can with 3 servings adds up to 240 mg caffeine per can!

What are the side effects of energy drinks?

There are down sides to high caffeine consumption. More than 400 mg of caffeine a day is considered high. If you regularly consume energy drinks, you can be susceptible to heart palpitations, increased blood pressure, dehydration, sleeplessness, irritability, bone loss, upset stomach, anxiety, and increased urination. Also, one should never mix alcohol with energy drinks. This greatly increases the possibility of dehydration and hinders a person’s ability to make decisions and may reduce inhibitions.

Caffeine and Adolescents

Studies show that high caffeine intake in adolescents results in difficulty sleeping and morning tiredness in addition to the other side effects. Teens may experience an energy boost, only to find they crash hours later.

What’s the difference between sports drinks and energy drinks?

Sports drinks restore fluid balance and prevent dehydration after rigorous exercise and sweating. Sports drinks replenish the electrolytes lost from sweating. Sports drinks do not contain energy “boosting” ingredients.



What about herbal products?

When a product claims to be “herbal”, the consumer is led to believe that it is natural and therefore safe. Herbal products do not undergo strict safety evaluations. These products do not need Food and Drug Administration approval to be sold to the consumer because they are considered food supplements, not drugs!

What’s a better way to feel energized?

- **Eat well.** When consuming a complete and balanced diet, chances are your energy levels won’t need an extra boost!
- **Get plenty of sleep.** If your body gets the rest it needs, you’re less likely to feel drowsy during the day.
- **Drink water to stay hydrated.** Dehydration will make you feel tired and it is dangerous for health.
- **Move It.** If you feel tired while studying or working, go for a 10-minute walk or do some exercises to make you more alert.
- **Drink coffee and/or tea in moderation.** Coffee and tea contain caffeine. One 8-ounce cup can contain between 40-180 milligrams of caffeine. Coffee or tea can provide an adequate “boost” without all the possible dangers that come with energy drinks.

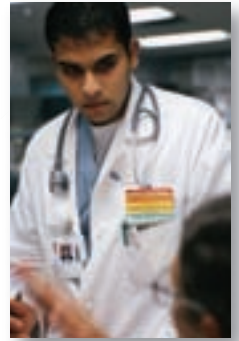


Check our publication listing for more information on the topic at <http://www.njaes.rutgers.edu/health> or contact your local Cooperative Extension office.



Cutting Health Care Costs

Barbara O'Neill, Ph.D., CFP®, *Extension Specialist in Financial Resource Management*



In recent years, health care costs have taken a big bite out of family budgets. Even if you have “good health insurance,” chances are you are paying more than you did five years ago. What to do?

- 1. Negotiate With Medical Providers** - A 2005 study that found that about two-thirds of patients who negotiated for lower prices with a hospital or dentist were successful, as were 3 in 5 who bargained with doctors.
- 2. Get the Facts** - Costs for common medical procedures can be found online at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Web site. When you know the cost of health care services, you're in a better position to negotiate discounts.
- 3. Track Your Expenses** - Develop a spreadsheet in a notebook or Microsoft Excel to keep track of annual deductibles, co-payments, and the amount of money remaining in flexible savings accounts.
- 4. Bring Your Own Equipment** - If you need medical equipment, such as crutches, buy it yourself or borrow it from a friend to avoid high hospital markups.
- 5. Check Bills for Errors** - As many as 8 in 10 hospital bills contain errors. To avoid getting over-billed, patients (or their loved ones) should keep a log of doctor visits, tests, and medications administered during their hospital stay to check against an itemized bill.
- 6. Follow the Rules** - The “fine print” in health plan documents explains requirements regarding referrals and pre-certification. Ignore it and you may have to pay for a procedure that is not covered.
- 7. Consider an HSA** - If you select a high deductible health plan to reduce premium costs, consider establishing a tax-deductible health savings account (HSA) to fund out-of-pocket medical expenses. For further information about HSAs, visit www.rce.rutgers.edu/healthfinance/health-savings-accounts.asp.
- 8. Use It or Lose It** - Spend down funds contributed to a flexible savings account (FSA) for health care by year-end or March of the following year (depending on the plan). If you don't have doctor bills, you can stock up on drug store items such as cold medicine, aspirin, and contact lens solution.
- 9. Go Generic** - Whenever possible, buy generic drugs, which cost less than a third as much as their brand name equivalents, on average.
- 10. Time Your Expenses** - If you're close to your health plan annual limit for doctor and dentist visits, split your appointments over two calendar years (e.g., December 2009 and January 2010).
- 11. Split Your Pills** - High-dose prescription drugs often cost the same as lower doses. If (and only if) your doctor approves, split a higher dose pill in half to save on drug plan co-payments.
- 12. Sample the Samples** - Doctors regularly receive prescription drug samples from pharmaceutical company representatives. Ask your doctor if a sample is available before filling a prescription.
- 13. Use the Internet** - Compare prescription drug prices at local retailers with online merchants that carry the Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Site (VIPPS) seal.
- 14. Quit Smoking** - Not only do cigarettes cost more than \$1,500 a year for pack-a-day smokers, but smokers pay \$1,600 more a year in health-care costs than non-smokers as well as higher premiums for health and life insurance.
- 15. Wash and Floss** - One of the best ways to avoid paying for cold and flu remedies is to scrub your hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds. One of the best ways to prevent periodontal disease is to floss your teeth daily.



Web Watch: Local Farms/Healthy Kids

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Whether they're school or community-based, urban farms or native land restoration projects, gardens are valuable teaching tools. The goal of this share-site is to bring people together to promote the environment, healthy eating, exercise, sustainability, self-reliance, core values, academics and charitable giving through garden initiatives.

Slow Food USA: Supporting Good, Clean and Fair Food
www.slowfoodusa.org

Slow Food is an idea, a way of living and a way of eating. It is a global, grassroots movement with thousands of members around the world that links the pleasure of food with a commitment to community and the environment.

In the United States, members of Slow Food USA's 200 chapters celebrate the amazing bounty of food that is available and work to strengthen the connection between the food on plates and the health of the planet. Members are involved in a variety of activities, including Farm to School.

Slow Food in Schools teaches youth about the values of eating locally, seasonally and sustainably through hands-on projects. Programs range from collaborating on curricula and after school activities to improving school lunches and school garden programs. The site features a

comprehensive list of Slow Food school projects from around the country.

Among its resources is the *Slow Food in Schools Micro-Grant* program, which supports "Garden to Table"

projects with Micro-Grants of up to \$1,000. Two types of grants are awarded: one for new projects (Sprouting Seeds) and one for capacity building and professional development (Double the Batch). In 2008, 16 projects received Micro-Grants to support such initiatives as construction of an in-garden bread oven, development of an instructional website, creation of a "Harvest of the Month" program which all support a mobile healthy snack, a cooking cart and garden educator training.

The web site features a directory of local *Slow Foods* projects. Organized by volunteer leaders, local chapters carry out the *Slow Food* mission in their communities. Chapters offer educational events and activities to promote sustainability and biodiversity. *Slow Foods* projects connect farmers, cooks, educators, students and everyone else who cares about their food and the environment. Check out what's happening with local chapters from Rutgers University and South, Central, Northern, and Princeton, New Jersey.

