For every parent who has lamented the blue slushies served in the lunchroom or watched in horror as Chef Jamie Oliver revealed the synthetic ingredients of school lunches in his Food Revolution TV series, take heart. Something fresh, local, and healthy is coming to New Jersey schools.

Grow Healthy, a new program that combines gardening with nutrition, physical activity, agriculture, and locally grown food projects, has been implemented by the Department of Family and Community Health Sciences (FCHS) of Rutgers Cooperative Extension this school year in nine counties, one school in each county. FCHS has introduced this program in: Warren, Union, Hunterdon, Somerset, Mercer, Burlington, Atlantic, Gloucester, and Cape May counties. Funding for the project is through a U.S. Department of Agriculture Team Nutrition grant awarded to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture.

Designed as a fun, hands-on initiative that supports New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards, Grow Healthy is a wellness program that involves school teachers, staff and administration, children, families, and volunteers who all work together to make school a healthier place. There are nutrition lessons in the classroom, school and family fitness events, foodservice trainings, wellness council support, and school gardens—all of which build healthier kids and families.

According to FCHS educators, what sets this program apart from other school health initiatives is its comprehensive approach, integrating the various components that inform kids’ food choices. Where other initiatives may fall short, this one goes the extra mile. For example, schools developing wellness policies may find that implementation falls flat when kids are inundated with sugary treats from uninformed teachers, when they are faced with unhealthy choices from limited school food selections, or when meeting resistance from reluctant parents who feel imposed upon by “the cupcake police.”

Grow Healthy taste testings give students a chance to try some “veggie” good foods.

Several Gloucester County students taste locally grown lettuce, cucumbers and tomatoes as part of their Grow Healthy classroom experience.

Reading, Writing and Radicchio: NJ Students Learn How to "Grow Healthy"
Luanne J. Hughes, MS, RD, FCHS Educator, Grow Healthy Project Investigator, Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Gloucester County

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Grow Healthy's strategy involves three components: educating food service staff, in-class initiatives, and developing school wellness councils.

The first component—food service staff training—began in the Spring of 2011 and was open to food service staff across New Jersey, in addition to the Grow Healthy pilot schools in the nine counties. Based on results from a Farm to School survey conducted by FCHS in the winter of 2011, educators were able to determine the ability of school food service personnel to serve fresh, local produce. They assessed whether schools were able to obtain fresh produce from New Jersey farmers, how they were managing it, and what barriers they encountered. The standards for safe handling of fresh fruits and vegetables are very different from those that pertain to serving processed foods.

The second component—in-class initiatives—employs another three distinct focus areas for the lessons: The first—The Food System—addresses where food comes from, what foods grow in New Jersey, and where to access out-of-season produce in New Jersey. The second component—Nutrition and Health—investigates healthy food choices where kids can learn about and taste different foods, as well as distinguish between everyday vs. sometimes vs. rarely-to-be eaten foods. The third component—Let’s Grow Our Own—gives kids hands-on gardening experience and takes them through the food growing cycle from soil preparation to harvest, and in some cases, composting the leftovers.

The third component—school wellness councils—bolsters the ability of schools to implement their wellness policies. This involves school and community partners working together on concerns about nutrition, physical activity, and overall school wellness.

What will be the measurements of success for this ambitious program? For the past four years, the FCHS award-winning Get Moving—Get Healthy New Jersey program has succeeded in helping families across the state to choose healthier eating habits and increase their physical activity. Pre- and post-program surveys of students, food service staff, and teachers will measure the increase in knowledge of the various aspects of healthy and locally sourced foods.

Sometimes the success of a program is measured in actual changes in behavior. FCHS educator Sandra Grceni relates an instance of triumph when meeting with their participating school wellness advocate, the school nurse from the Frances A. Desmares Elementary School in Flemington, NJ. While tending to a hungry student who was sent to her office, the nurse asked the child what kind of snack she wanted. “Can I have a cup of those little tomatoes?” the child replied, referring to the cherry tomatoes they had tasted from their school garden. Sweet success!
When Disaster Strikes: Food Safety in an Emergency
Sherri Cirignano, MS, RD, LDN, FCHS Educator, Warren County

Throughout each year, there are opportunities for weather and other emergencies to compromise the safety of our food at home. Knowing what to do to prepare for this possible emergency, as well as what to do during and after it, can help to keep your food, and family, safe.

Preparing For an Emergency

Preparing ahead for adequate and safe food and water is very important in case of an emergency such as loss of power due to high winds, snow and/or ice, fire, flood or other emergency situations. If possible, maintain a food and water supply that will last for two weeks. Start with what is already on your shelves, checking expiration dates. Choose foods that are a nutritional choice, require no refrigeration, special preparation or cooking and do not require washing. Aim to store enough water to provide one-half gallon per person, per day for two weeks if possible. This amount is for drinking water. Water is also needed for food preparation and personal hygiene. It is ideal to purchase commercially bottled water or to prepare your own water supply using food grade containers from surplus or camping supply stores. Sterilized plastic soft drink bottles can also be used, but it is recommended to never use milk or juice containers to store water as it is difficult to fully clean these containers. Expiration or “use by” dates should be monitored and water supplies should be replaced every six months.

Plan ahead for the safety of perishable food items by assuring that these foods are kept at recommended safe temperatures every day. This can be achieved by keeping appliance thermometers in both the refrigerator and the freezer. The thermometer in the refrigerator should be at or below 40˚F and the thermometer in the freezer should be at or below 0˚F at all times. In the case of a known impending weather situation, freeze refrigerated items that are not being used, make containers of frozen water for use as ice packs and have coolers readily available.

Preparing and maintaining a Disaster Supply Kit in an easily accessible area of your home, work and/or car will be a big help if disaster strikes. In addition to being accessible, your kit should also be up to date and portable. We often prepare our home for an emergency, but having the kit ready to take with you is important if the need to evacuate should occur. (Please see Basic Disaster Supplies Kit below for more information.) In preparing for a disaster, it is also important to plan ahead for anyone in your home who may have special needs. This could include babies or toddlers, a pregnant or nursing mother, older or chronically ill persons or anyone with a special diet or food allergy.

Basic Disaster Supplies Kit

- Three-day supply of nonperishable food and manual can opener.
- Three-day supply of water (one gallon of water per person, per day).
- Portable, battery-powered radio or television, and extra batteries.
- Flashlight and extra batteries.
- First aid kit and manual.
- Sanitation and hygiene items (hand sanitizer, moist towelettes, and toilet paper).
- Matches in waterproof container.
- Whistle.
- Extra clothing and blankets.
- Kitchen accessories and cooking utensils.
- Photocopies of identification and credit cards.
- Cash and coins.
- Special needs items such as prescription medications, eye glasses, contact lens solution, and hearing aid batteries.
- Items for infants, such as formula, diapers, bottles, and pacifiers.
- Tools, pet supplies, a map of the local area, and other items to meet your unique family needs.

Food and Water in an Emergency. FEMA and American Red Cross, 2004

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Does your family have such jam-packed schedules and differing priorities that it’s challenging to enjoy healthy meals together? It doesn’t have to be that way! Getting your family involved in planning and preparing meals, and making eating together fun, can make mealtime an event no one wants to miss.

Family mealtimes pay huge dividends. When a parent is present, meals often include more fruits, vegetables, and grains and fewer soft drinks. Other bonuses of regular family meals are that kids tend to be happier, feel more connected to the family, and do better in school. Plus, regular family meals reduce the chances that kids will drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes or marijuana.

Action Step: Making Family Mealtime Priority
With patience and persistence, family mealtime can become a natural part of your family’s routine. Keep in mind that family meals don’t have to be at dinnertime—breakfast or weekend lunches may be a better solution for your family.

Q. How will you make meal preparation a family affair?
A. Everybody likes to have fun and feel satisfied with their work. Make the decision to approach meal preparation as a fun activity the whole family can enjoy. This decision is easier when you consider the benefits.

- Kids are naturally interested in food and cooking—by helping in the kitchen they quickly learn valuable life skills!
- Working side-by-side in the kitchen with your children is a great way to show them you value healthy eating and food safety.
- If you have fussy eaters, it’s especially important to get them involved. When they help in the kitchen, they are more likely to eat the foods served.
- Sharing meal preparation time can promote family bonding—use it to chat with your children and catch up on topics important to them.

Try to make preparing meals together a regular event. If weeknights are too hectic, use weekend time to cook a big meal as a family and then freeze leftovers for weekday meals.

Set Some Goals
What are the top 3 changes that would do the most to make family mealtime a priority? What supplies do you need to make the changes? What strategies will you use to overcome barriers to shaping up your kitchen? Resolve to spend 10 minutes a day to reach your goals. Then, enjoy the benefits of the improvements.

Q. How will you make mealtime an event no one wants to miss?
A. Here are some tips!
- Set a regular family mealtime. The whole family can pick the time together.
- Keep snacks from dam pening mealtime appetites. Separate snacktime from mealtime by at least 2 hours.
- Clear away clutter, turn off the TV and cell phones, and turn on soothing music.
- Add simple touches like candles, wildflowers, colorful napkins, or straws to beverages.
- Make mealtime a sit-down event. By sitting down to eat, there is less danger of choking. Plus, it provides time for everyone to focus on eating and each other.

Families who eat together (especially with the TV off!) often have the healthiest diets!

- Come to meals with a relaxed and positive frame of mind. And, make it a point to enjoy each other’s company and give everyone a chance to talk. Focus on pleasant topics—save serious discussions for other times.
- Be a role model—show your family you eat and enjoy healthy foods.
- Give kids lots of opportunities to try new foods. It may take 8 times or more before kids will accept a new food. Sometimes, though, a child may never develop a liking for a food. If so, respect the child’s feelings.
- Remember, no food is a ‘must eat’. Let kids decide how much to eat—pressuring them only creates negative feelings.
- Watch portion sizes! The amount you eat can greatly affect the overall healthfulness of a meal or snack. Smaller plates look fuller with less food—a great way to trim portion sizes! Serve water in large glasses and juice in small glasses.

Mealtime is about sharing – not only food, but your hopes, dreams, and values!
While walking through the dairy aisle of your local grocery store, you may be overwhelmed by the numerous types of yogurt available. Shelves are stocked with every flavor, brand and consistency imaginable. So how does one choose which yogurt to purchase?

It is important to note that for the most part, yogurt is a healthy food choice. Yogurt is packed with calcium and protein and most types contain probiotics, which are live active cultures that promote a healthy digestive system by maintaining the balance of organisms found in the intestines. However, not all types of yogurt are created equal. Some yogurt contains more fat, sugar, additives and artificial flavorings than others. For example, let’s take a look at low-fat or fat-free Greek yogurt. If one desires a richer and creamier taste for the same amount of calories and fat as regular yogurt, low-fat or fat-free Greek yogurt is the one to choose.

All types of yogurt are produced by the introduction of live cultures to milk. Greek yogurt, however, goes through an additional step of straining in which the whey is removed from the original product. Because of the additional straining, Greek yogurt has less water, hence a richer and creamier texture than regular yogurt. During the additional straining process, milk sugar known as lactose is removed from the yogurt. The removal of the additional lactose makes Greek yogurt easier to digest for people who suffer from lactose intolerance. This also means that plain Greek yogurt has a lower sugar content than its regular yogurt counterpart. Six ounces of plain Greek yogurt contains 6 grams of sugar, while six ounces of plain traditional yogurt contains 12 grams of sugar. Greek yogurt also has a higher protein and lower carbohydrate content. A six ounce serving of Greek yogurt has 15 to 20 grams of protein, in comparison to a six ounce serving of regular yogurt that contains only 9 grams. That same serving of plain Greek yogurt has only 5 to 8 grams of carbohydrate unlike regular yogurt that can have 13 to 17 grams of carbohydrate. Most Greek yogurt has no preservatives, additives or artificial flavorings, while other yogurts often add these things to improve the texture or flavor.

Greek yogurt also has greater versatility than traditional yogurts. Its tangy flavor and creamy texture lends itself to be an excellent substitute in sweet or savory dishes. Try Greek yogurt instead of sour cream, cream cheese, butter or mayonnaise in your favorite dishes or mix Greek yogurt with spices and seasonings for a delicious dip. Greek yogurt also tastes delicious with fresh or frozen fruit, granola, or sweeten the plain varieties with some honey.

Remember to always look at the nutrition facts label before you purchase yogurt. Consider trying low-fat or fat-free varieties of Greek yogurt as they are very creamy and rich. While Greek yogurt is still a good source of calcium, most types have a slightly reduced calcium content than traditional yogurt. Make sure to eat other calcium rich foods throughout the day including other dairy products, calcium fortified juices, cereals, breads, rice milk, or almond milk. Other sources of calcium include: canned fish (sardines, salmon with bones) soybeans and other soy products (tofu made with calcium sulfate, soy yogurt, tempeh), some other beans, and some leafy greens (collard and turnip greens, kale, bok choy). The amount of calcium that can be absorbed from these foods varies.

Try one of the many varieties of Greek yogurt next time you are in your local supermarket. You will see that the higher protein content and creamy texture of Greek yogurt is sure to satisfy you and keep you full much longer than traditional yogurt.

Shaping Jersey Kitchens: Making Family Mealtime a Priority
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- Make eating the foods served at mealtime an expectation for the whole family! Kids quickly learn that refusing to eat gets them lots of attention. It’s also a good idea to not talk about eating behavior in front of kids.
- Keep table time realistic—even 15 minutes together can be valuable.
Eating Regionally and Seasonally

Kristine Caiafa, Dietetic Intern, UMDNJ
Karen Ensle EdD, RD, FADA, CFCS, Preceptor and Family & Community Health Sciences Educator, Union County

New Jersey is a state of horticultural abundance, with farmers from across the land producing an immense variety of vegetables and fruits from season to season. Farmers from the state grow everything from cherries and peaches to okra and sweet corn. We can support our communities, our family's health, and our environment by buying foods grown in New Jersey. Have you ever looked around the grocery store and wondered how the same foods can be available all year round? Different crops are best harvested at various times throughout the year, so when you see green peppers in the middle of winter you know they must have been shipped from somewhere that is experiencing summer. Though we depend on this convenience, the movement and preparation of food by industry creates massive energy costs.

Vegetables and fruits that are shipped across the world contribute to a number of high energy processes before they reach consumers. Transporting foods requires fuel, a non-renewable resource. During the long journey, produce must be preserved in refrigerated environments. This uses a significant amount of energy. Large-scale producers can also preserve foods using chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), which are known to deplete the ozone layer that protects the earth from the sun’s radiation. Buying vegetables and fruits from local sources when they are naturally ripe (“in-season”) preserves many of our natural resources and supports responsible environmental practices.

Purchasing ‘Jersey Fresh’ foods can also strengthen local economies. Community farmers markets are usually held weekly and bring together farmers from the region to sell their produce. Regional eating is considered as trying to eat only foods grown or produced within a 100-mile radius. At the markets you can talk directly to the farmer who harvested your squash or tomatoes, discussing the best recipe to use it in. You can learn how the food is grown and harvested. Since your food dollar goes directly to the farmer, purchasing produce at a market or a roadside stand contributes to the local economy. Strong support from regional consumers is what keeps many small farmers in business and contributes to the region’s overall economic viability.

When buying locally, there is less concern for food safety and quality. It ensures that your family is getting the freshest products with the highest nutrient content. Many agree that local produce is fresher, tastes better and looks more appealing than foods that have travelled thousands of miles to get there. Eating regional and seasonal foods can have other benefits. You may recognize yourself becoming more aware of agricultural cycles as you anticipate delicious summer strawberries or the taste of a dark red, juicy, vine-ripened tomato harvested at the peak of the summer season. The fall harvest brings a host of new seasonal vegetables and fruits to taste.

The produce we buy, as well as where we buy it, impacts our family’s health and our environment. You will reap the benefits when you make an effort to eat regionally and seasonally! Visit the New Jersey Department of Agriculture’s Jersey Fresh website to look up farm events, roadside markets and pick-your-own farms near you, as well as, recipes featuring New Jersey’s produce and schedules for what is in season. Go to: http://www.jerseyfresh.nj.gov/

Are you interested in becoming a regional and seasonal eater?

- Visit a farm where families are invited to pick whatever vegetables and fruits are in season from the field.
- Buy produce from a farmer’s market or go apple picking!
- In the winter try less familiar vegetables that are in season: kohlrabi, rutabagas, celeriac, Jerusalem artichokes, parsnips, kale or turnips.
- Experiment with seasonal recipes.
- Request that supermarket managers post signs identifying the origins of produce.
- Consider joining a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) group. When you do this, you essentially become a shareholder in the farm’s production. By pledging a certain amount of money in advance, you receive a share of each week’s harvest through the growing season. That means your produce shopping is covered, and you are getting the freshest crops. Learn more about CSAs at www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/csa/csa.shtml.

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Sugar is in many of the foods that we eat. Fruits, vegetables, and milk contain natural sugars while other foods like candy, cakes, and sodas have sugars added to them to give them extra sweetness. Foods that contain natural sugars also contain other nutrients such as vitamins, protein, and fiber that make them a better choice than foods with added sugars. A variety of different names can be used for added sugars. These names can be found on food labels in the ingredient list. See the box for a list of “hidden” sugars. Added sugars have between 15 – 20 calories in every teaspoon. Foods with added sugar tend to be “empty calories” because they provide us with energy, but they are not nutritionally balanced.

Eating foods with too much sugar can lead to weight gain and other health issues such as heart disease, increased blood pressure, kidney disease and increased cholesterol. Excess sugar consumption can also result in dental caries or even loss of teeth. We all have bacteria in our mouths and these bacteria need sugar to grow. Foods such as cakes, candies and cookies have simple sugars that bacteria love; they help bacteria grow faster. Fruits, vegetables, and meats, however, slow down bacteria growth and actually clean our teeth. If we do eat foods that are high in sugar, it is important that we brush our teeth soon after consuming them to prevent bacteria growth.

While we should watch our overall sugar intake, we should also try to choose foods with natural sugars instead of added sugars. When choosing a snack or dessert, pick up a piece of fruit over a donut or a cookie—something with a natural sugar in it—as it will satisfy your sweet tooth and leave you feeling good! To limit sugar intake, try to choose more foods from the fruit, vegetable, protein and dairy groups. Sugar is everywhere; it just doesn’t have to fill up your diet!

References:

For more information check out:
The American Dental Society: www. ada.org
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: www.eatright.org
MyPlate: www.choosemyplate.gov

### Northeast Region Summer Crop Schedule

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When Disaster Strikes: Food Safety in an Emergency

continued from page 3

During an Emergency

If an emergency situation arises and you are without electricity, maintaining your food and water supply is the main goal. To keep perishable food safe, keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible. Follow these simple rules if you are without electricity for an extended period of time: First, use perishable food from the refrigerator and pantry; Next, use food from the freezer, thawing it out safely in a cooler with freezer packs and; Finally, use non-perishable food items.

After an Emergency

Once an emergency has been resolved and electricity has returned, it is important to carefully consider all perishable food before it is eaten. Food in an unopened refrigerator will be maintained at safe temperatures for approximately 4 hours. All refrigerated perishables such as meat, poultry, fish, soft cheeses, milk, eggs, leftovers, deli items, etc. should be discarded after 4 hours without electricity. To determine if freezer items are safe, check the freezer temperature as soon as the power returns. If the freezer temperature is at 40˚F or below, the food is safe and may be used or safely refrozen. A freezer’s temperature will hold in a full freezer for approximately 48 hours and 24 hours if half full and the doors remain closed. As always, if in doubt, throw it out!

For more information check out:
