



Apple ‘Crunch,’ Chili Lunch Highlight National Farm to the School Month Activities

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MADISON – In recognition of October as National Farm to School Month, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection and the Wisconsin Farm to School Network are participating in two events aimed at expanding local food purchasing in cafeterias in institutional settings such as schools, early care centers, and hospitals.

The first event, the 5th annual Great Lakes Great Apple Crunch, will see upwards of 1.7 million students and educators from throughout the Great Lakes region bite into a locally sourced apple at noon, Thursday, Oct. 11.

The second event, the 1st annual Wisconsin Chili Lunch, is set for Thursday, Nov. 15. During the lunch, participating schools, colleges, early care sites and other institutional lunchrooms will serve chili utilizing as many local ingredients as possible. The chili lunch was tried out on a limited basis in the Coulee Region last year, where it was deemed a success. The effort is spreading this year, and to date about 50 sites across Wisconsin have agreed to participate.

“By bringing the entire state and region together to emphasize a few specific food items, these special events allow us to test the supply chain for new food items that Wisconsin excels at producing, such as dried beans, beef, apples, and cheese,” said Charlotte Litjens, Wisconsin Farm to School director. “They also allow our hard-working food service directors to step out of their daily routine and celebrate the abundance of the season while testing out local purchasing.”

Through special events like these, said Litjens, food directors and purchasers for institutional cafeterias “are encouraged to create new relationships or celebrate existing relationships with their local producers, and use the opportunity to educate their students and communities about local agriculture.”

The term “farm to school” encompasses efforts to bring local or regionally produced foods into school cafeterias and classrooms; hands on learning activities such as school gardening, farm visits, and culinary classes; and the integration of food-related education into classroom curriculum. Litjens said “farm to school” promotes the health of children, farms and communities by connecting schools to local farms that supply nutritious, fresh, and minimally processed foods.

The Wisconsin Farm to School program is administered by DATCP. Nearly half of all Wisconsin school districts participate in farm to school programming, with \$9.2 million spent on local foods annually.

National Farm to School month has been celebrated since 2010, when it was recognized by congressional proclamation.

Now in its fifth year, the Great Lakes Great Apple Crunch includes strong support from Farm to School programs and networking partners in the following states: Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio. To register, or learn more, visit: <https://www.cias.wisc.edu/applecrunch/>. The Great Lakes Great Apple Crunch maintains a Facebook page where people will post Crunch celebrations as well. (www.facebook.com/GreatLakesGreatAppleCrunch).

For more information about the Wisconsin Chili Lunch, including how to register, visit <https://www.cias.wisc.edu/chililunch/>.