

# Vegetable Notes

For Vegetable Farmers in Massachusetts

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This issue of Vegetable Notes gives information on the Massachusetts Farm to School Program, protecting our water supply, and winter hoop house and greenhouse crop production.

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## LOCAL KIDS SHOULD BE EATING LOCAL FOOD!

The Massachusetts School Foodservice Association is proud to announce our new “**Get Fresh Get Local**” project. Funded by a grant, the project will investigate ways of including more locally grown fruits and vegetables in the public school cafeterias of Massachusetts. “**Get Fresh Get Local**” promotes the community, economic, educational, and health benefits of serving fresh locally grown food to our young people.

Understanding that foodservice personnel can find it difficult to make the shift to using locally grown ingredients, the project is providing detailed technical assistance to the five pilot schools which were selected as “**Get Fresh Get Local**” partners. Information gained from the experience of these pilot schools will be shared across the state with other school foodservice directors.

**The five pilot school districts are BELCHERTOWN, HUDSON, MAYNARD, MIDDLEBORO, and WORCESTER.**

These school districts range in size from 700 to 18,000 meals served per day and differ in their purchasing priorities and delivery requirements. However, each is eager to serve more locally grown food and to try to make it work for both the school system and the local growers.

***Do you have products you want to sell to schools?***

If you would like to investigate selling products to any of these five school districts, please contact the project coordinator, Kelly Erwin. She can be reached at 413-253-3844 or at [kelerwin@localnet.com](mailto:kelerwin@localnet.com).

*-Kelly Erwin, Massachusetts School Foodservice Association*

## MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOL FOODSERVICE ASSOCIATION WINS GRANT TO GET LOCAL FOOD INTO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Massachusetts School Foodservice Association (MSFSA) is the professional association of K-12 foodservice workers in the state. Realizing that many public schools have an interest in buying locally grown products but few have managed to do so, the MSFSA applied for grant funds to launch a pilot project. MSFSA views this project in the larger context of their work to improve the nutritional value of

school meals and to combat childhood obesity.

The grant provides technical assistance to each pilot school, as it faces issues related to product availability, delivery, price, payment terms, and promotion. The project coordinator, Kelly Erwin (formerly of the Mass. Dept. of Food and Agriculture), will work to match growers with schools in a way that works well for both parties.

The five pilot schools were chosen in October and have different characteristics (urban, rural, small, large, etc.). Each offers different opportunities and challenges for growers. Although the project is just beginning, it appears that price and payment terms may be less problematic than issues related to delivery requirements and order size.

If successful school/grower relationships are created, then joint delivery systems, crop season extension and processed products could be logical and lucrative next steps in this market.

## **PROTECTING DRINKING WATER WITH SWAP-INFORMATION FOR VEGETABLE FARMERS APPLYING PESTICIDES**

SWAP is the Source Water Assessment and Protection Program, created by Congress in 1996. It is a program designed to identify potential threats to drinking water sources. Through this program, Massachusetts is developing a SWAP report and map for each public water system. This report describes the potential threats to the public water system and also recommends strategies to protect drinking water locally. The SWAP report is meant to be a planning tool to help protect our public water supplies.

There are four steps to the SWAP program:

1. Identify and map the water protection area,
2. Inventory the land uses in those areas,
3. Determine the susceptibility of the land use to polluting the water and
4. Publicize the results.

Certain land uses could compromise the quality of drinking water supplies. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection has ranked pesticide storage or use as a high potential threat

to drinking water supplies. Lawn care, fertilizer storage and use, nurseries, and composting facilities have been ranked as moderate threats. The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) is developing an education program to teach farmers about best agricultural practices. The goals of the program are to explain SWAP, address why it is important and try to help the farmers protect our water resources. It will also provide information on where technical and financial assistance can be obtained. A brochure is currently available and a manual will be available by January 1st 2004. The other side of the education program is geared towards the Public Water Suppliers for each system. The goals of that program are to help the water suppliers understand agriculture and what is considered general agricultural practices. Information will be provided to teach them how to work with farmers and not against them. For more information please contact Angie Moschini, SWAP Coordinator from MDAR at amoschini@earthlink.net or by calling (413) 262-1816.

## **ISSUE BRIEF: AMERICA'S FARMS FEED AMERICA'S CHILDREN**

In reaction to a variety of emerging U.S. food and agriculture issues - such as low farm prices, sustainable agriculture, local food systems, the relation between diet and health, and limited access to affordable food outlets in many U.S. communities - food security as a uniquely household problem began to merge with the problems facing food producers and the larger food environment under the hybrid concept of "community food security."

Community food security recognizes the need to use a host of community-based institutions and sectors - from agriculture to community development to public health to government assistance - to achieve true food security for all households in a given area or region (Community Food Security Coalition: [www.foodsecurity.org](http://www.foodsecurity.org)).

At a policy level, community food security has emphasized the historical connection between the economic viability of the farm sector and the food security of lower-income (i.e. at-risk for food insecurity) households. President Truman established

the National School Lunch Program for national security reasons. President George Bush established the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program in 1989 to increase low-income families' use of fresh produce at farmers' markets.

The growing interest in the meals that children are offered in public schools and the growing problem of obesity (61 percent of Americans are overweight or obese, Center for Disease Control/BRFSS data) once again brings food security and nutrition to a crossroads with local agriculture. The American School Food Service Association estimates that 30 percent of the nation's 23,000 public schools sell fast food. To partially offset the impact of unhealthy food environments on children, nutrition advocates and school districts have turned to sourcing food for school meals from local farms. While a definition of "local" in this context does not exist, it is generally understood to mean food produced within the state or sub-region where the school district is located. The link is thought to have two benefits: children start the habit of eating more fresh, locally-produced food early in life, especially when their eating is supported by food and farm education activities including gardening, and farmers develop new markets with often higher returns for their goods.

Evidence to date suggests that children will significantly increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables (and other healthy food) from local farms when they are prepared and served in a tasty and attractive manner. Similarly, farmers have expressed satisfaction with selling to local schools because it generates additional income from nearby customers (Cornell University, Wilkens, 2002). At least 68 school districts around the country currently operate farm-to-school programs with many more planning to do so in 2003 (Community Food Security Coalition, Marion Kalb: marion@foodsecurity.org). Overall, the interest in this approach is strong as evidenced by the first national Farm-to-School Conference held in Seattle in October 2002, which drew more than 300 people.

*-Mark Winne, Food and Society Policy Fellow  
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## **CONGRESS WORKS TO BRING LOCAL FOOD TO LOCAL SCHOOLS**

To facilitate the development of farm-to-school programs and the benefits they have to children and farmers, the Community Food Security Coalition has developed a proposal for inclusion in the Child Nutrition Act, scheduled for reauthorization by Congress in 2003. Known as "Growing Healthy Kids: American Farms Feed American Children," the proposal would establish a competitive grant program of up to \$100,000 per school district from an annual appropriation of \$10 million. Funds could be used by school districts and community-based non-profit organizations to pay for development and start-up costs associated with farm-to-school programs. These could include the purchase of equipment and storage facilities, staff training, the development of procurement and delivery systems, menu planning, and the development of experiential nutrition education programs including farm tours, and the construction of school food gardens (Community Food Security Coalition, Thomas Forster: thomas@foodsecurity.org).

The Child Nutrition program, which includes the National School Breakfast, School Lunch, and Summer Meal programs, is administered by United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Collectively these programs funnel more than \$16 billion annually to local school districts through state departments of education. The annual food portion of that funding is more than \$8 billion, a small portion of which, if directed through school meal programs to farms near the more populated areas of the country, could make a significant impact on the vitality of local agriculture. And as early reports indicate, the best approach to nutrition education is to begin it early in childhood and to teach it through experiential learning methods. The hope is that schools can help children develop a lifetime of healthy eating behaviors while child nutrition programs can support farmers and the development of viable local agricultural businesses.

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## UMASS RESEARCHER STUDYING WINTER SALAD GROWING FOR FARM TO SCHOOL CONTRACTS

As Congress, parents and schools recognize that school lunches need to be healthier to combat the epidemic of obesity in our nation's children, farmers in the Northeast have to deal with the reality that growing seasons and school calendars do not always match. Schools can (and do) purchase meat, dairy, eggs, and cheese as well as winter squash, potatoes, and onions. However, growers' coops and farmers in Massachusetts are getting many inquiries about salad, which is a real challenge for us. Cole slaw (cabbage and carrots) is a possibility, but in order to make the salads as nutritious as possible, other green salads and vegetables should be available for contracts as well.

For the next five years, Dr. Anne Carter's field and greenhouse/hoop house research will be devoted to growing "anything that can be put into a salad." The research will be done in various types of grower and university greenhouses. The goal is not only to grow vegetables and herbs, but also to keep heating costs to a minimum. She hopes to be able to have as many successions as possible (to meet weekly school contracts) with the lowest greenhouse night-time and daytime temperatures possible for growth. Over the long term, passive heating (supported by other means of heat for emergencies) will be less costly. A number of passive heating experiments are under way.

She is confident that ways can be found to grow anything in the winter, but if they are not cost effective then the viability of farm to school contracts is immediately lost. Carter has visited a number of farms that are using high tunnels and the smaller winter hoop houses. Carter, like many other growers, is adapting much of the original work done by Eliot Coleman in Maine and Ed Stockman in Massachusetts. There are other growers who are using wood, hot water, propane and compost to add extra heat in the winter.

Two hoophouses are partially completed at the University of Massachusetts Agronomy and Vegetable Farm. A third steam-heated double-poly hoop house on the UMass campus is filled with lettuce

and spinach and research will soon begin on carrots and broccoli. The heat is turned on when the greenhouse temperature falls below 50 °F. Ventilation occurs if the temperature rises above 75 °F.

Several varieties of red and green leaf lettuce and spinach have been planted in succession every two weeks. Temperature of the growing medium, air temperature and accumulated degree-days are recorded daily as the seeds germinate and grow to harvest. The fourth succession of lettuce and spinach will go in the week before Christmas, followed by a series of broccoli and carrot experiments.

The results are very preliminary, of course. Dr. Carter feels that it would be unfair to mention variety names at this point as the work is just beginning. However, some varieties are definitely tolerating the cooler temperatures better than others, so variety trials will be important to the success of the project. This is truer for the spinach than for the lettuce. Also, it is interesting to note that the intensity of the color of red in lettuce varies with the amount of sunshine. This will be important as a vendor is less like to pick a pale red lettuce.

More articles and presentations will be forthcoming as the research continues through the next five years. Next fall, some growers will be repeating trials on their own farms. For more information contact Anne Carter at [akcarter@pssci.umass.edu](mailto:akcarter@pssci.umass.edu).

*-Anne Carter, University of Massachusetts  
Department of Plant and Soil Sciences*

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### **January 2nd NEVBGA & Cooperative Extension Meeting in Chicopee**

The New England Vegetable and Berry Growers Association and New England States Cooperative Extension will be holding an all day meeting on Friday, January 2, 2004. Topics covered will include:

- Strawberry Black Root Rot
- Sweet Corn Weed Management
- Vegetable Variety Trials
- How We Grow Beets at Wilson Farm
- Business Meeting, Show and Tell
- Control of Ticks, Fleas, Mosquitoes and Other Insects Around the Farm
- Annual Strawberry Production
- Potentially Invasive Pests in New England
- Row Cover Management

The event will begin at 9:30am and will end at 4:00pm. There will be a \$10 registration fee for those who are not members of the New England Vegetable and Berry Growers Association. There will be a lunch offered at noon *by reservation only*. If you are interested in making a lunch reservation for this event, please call (508) 378-2546 *before Monday, December 29th*.

Certified Pesticide Applicators attending this meeting will receive credits towards recertification.

The meeting will be held at the Park Inn, 450 Memorial Drive, Chicopee, MA. Take Exit #5 off the Mass. Pike (I-90).

### **January 22nd Connecticut Vegetable and Small Fruit Growers Conference**

To be held in Vernon, CT. See page six.

### **2004 Renewals**

Don't forget to renew your Vegetable Notes subscription for 2004! See enclosed renewal form, logon to [www.umassvegetable.org](http://www.umassvegetable.org) (click on "subscribe" under the Newsletter heading), or call Nicholas Connor at (413) 545-3696

## POSITION AVAILABLE

Assistant Farm Manager for two acre certified organic farm which serves as a therapeutic and vocational training site for homeless men and women. Responsibilities include assisting the farm manager in all aspects of seedling and crop production, local sales, and supervision of client workers. 25 week position from mid-April through mid-October 2004. Previous experience in agriculture necessary and working with special needs populations preferred. \$500 per week salary. Valid drivers license. Send resume and cover letter to:

Jean-Claude Bourrut, Long Island Shelter, P.O. Box 158, Boston, MA 02122. 617-534-2526 x304. [Jcbourrut@bphc.org](mailto:Jcbourrut@bphc.org)

**Vegetable Notes** is a publication of the University of Massachusetts Extension Vegetable Program which provides research-based information on integrated management of soils, crops, pests, and marketing on Massachusetts farms.

For more information about the Vegetable Team's research and UMass Extension programs, visit our website at [www.umassvegetable.org](http://www.umassvegetable.org) or call Ruth Hazzard at 413-545-3696.

# CONNECTICUT VEGETABLE AND SMALL FRUIT GROWERS CONFERENCE

Thursday, January 22, 2004  
Tolland County Agricultural Center, 24 Hyde Avenue (Route 30), Vernon, CT

Sponsored by: University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System & Plant Science Dept.

**8:15-9:00** Registration \$20 at the door (lunch & coffee/donuts included as a 4-H Club benefit)  
Coffee & donuts/Trade Show

## PROGRAM

Morning Moderator - Lorraine Los, University of Connecticut

<b>9:00 AM</b>	Welcome - Mary Musgrave, Department Head, Department of Plant Science, University of Connecticut
<b>9:05</b>	Perimeter Trap Cropping for Cucumbers, Jude Boucher, University of Connecticut
<b>9:30</b>	Management of Weevils & White Grubs in Strawberries and Blueberries, Richard Cowles, Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station
<b>10:00</b>	High Tunnels for the Production of Horticultural Crops, Bill Lamont, Penn State University
<b>10:45-11:00</b>	Break (Coffee & donuts/Trade Show)
<b>11:00</b>	Growing Raspberries in the Greenhouse at Woodstock Orchards, Doug Young, Woodstock Orchards, Woodstock, CT
<b>11:15</b>	Mechanical Weed Control Tools, Vern Grubinger, University of Vermont
<b>11:45</b>	Growing and Marketing Niche Ethnic Crops, Frank Mangan, University of Massachusetts
<b>12:15-1:15</b>	Lunch break/Trade Show (Lunch included in registration fee as a 4-H Club benefit)

Afternoon moderator - Jude Boucher, University of Connecticut,

<b>1:15</b>	Farmer Innovations in Cover Cropping Systems, Vern Grubinger, University of Vermont
<b>1:45</b>	How do I get Some of My Land Certified Organic, Rob Durgy, University of Connecticut
<b>2:00</b>	Plectosporium Blight and Other Diseases of Cucurbits, Rob Wick, University of Massachusetts
<b>2:30</b>	Greenhouse Tomato Cultivar Trials in Connecticut 1999-2002, Martin Gent, Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station
<b>3:00</b>	Interpreting Pre-sidedress Nitrogen Test (PSNT) Recommendations for Sweet Corn in a Wet Year. Tom Morris, University of Connecticut
<b>3:30</b>	4 Re-certification Credits.

Directions: Take Exit 67 off I-84. Take Route 31 north to junction of Route 30 at first traffic light. Turn right on to Route 30. Tolland County Ag Center is on right just after Rockville Savings Bank.