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Farm to school program promotes healthier eating for students

Fresh produce is part of district's green initiative

By MARY BUCKLEY

Posted: Oct. 9, 2009

Brown Deer — Stacks of pink watermelon slices, containers of bright red cherry tomatoes and green peppers, corn on the cob - the menu in the Brown Deer cafeterias has been pumped up with fresh local produce since the start of the school year.

Food Service Director Jenni Stricker said all Taher-operated school cafeterias are participating in the Farm to School program that brings the best local produce to students.

Every Monday since Sept. 1, Stricker has called an order into Taher. An employee takes the orders to the Badgerland Produce Co-op Auction in Montello.

"They buy what we need and it is delivered the same day," Stricker said.

Produce is picked and sold within 24 hours of harvesting. It doesn't get any fresher than that in a cafeteria.

The high school cafeteria offers four fruits and two vegetables every day.

"We provide as much fresh as we can," Stricker said.

Refining palates

Taher cafeterias promote a fresh fruit and vegetable each month and a grain each quarter.

Melons were the September fruit, tomatoes the vegetable. In October, apples take center stage along with cabbage. Corn is the grain of the quarter.

More unusual fruits and vegetables will also be offered, avocados and rutabagas in December for instance, or star fruit and sun chokes in February.

"We are only a month into the program and we are encouraging them to try different things," Stricker said. "We had a lot of comments on yellow watermelon (offered earlier in September)."

Stricker pointed out the farm to school program also ties into going green, part of the Green and Healthy School incentive under way in the district this year.

"The benefits include keeping local farms in business and the produce is fabulous," Stricker said.

There are some challenges.

"We don't know if we will get what we order and it does cost slightly more, although not enough to cause an increase in lunch prices," she said.

On a recent day at the high school, the menu included corn dogs, a pasta bar and a gourmet salad bar.

The local produce included watermelon, corn on the cob, cherry tomatoes and peppers. The corn, cut from the cob on that day, was mixed into a southwest-themed black bean and corn salad. There was also a broccoli salad.

The students' plates showed a great deal of variety and a varying knowledge of nutrition.

The watermelon slices were a huge hit, with students helping themselves to eight slices in some cases. The cherry tomatoes and sliced green peppers, along with the black bean and corn salad, were largely ignored.

Junior Alex Her had a corn dog, macaroni and cheese, broccoli salad and watermelon on his tray. He approved of the offerings.

"I think I do eat more fruits and veggies here but I don't eat much of that at home," he said.

His friends, Trevor Hogg and Aaron Blumberg, both brown-bag.

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BROWN DEER PREP SPOTLIGHT

"I find it easier to just pack at home," Trevor said.

Blumberg has a years-long brown-bagging streak.

"I haven't eaten in the cafeteria for nine years," he said. He likes the idea of the watermelon but, "The line is too long."

Variety noticed, appreciated

Seniors Ayona Riley and Justine Johnson have noticed a greater variety of vegetables.

"Last year it was carrots or broccoli," Ayona said. "There is a greater variety of vegetables and more salads."

With that said, the girls were sharing a lunch of corn dogs, French fries and watermelon. The black beans were probably keeping their peers away from that salad, the girls agreed.

The co-op operates through the end of October and opens again in May. Through the winter months, there will fresh pears, apples, bananas, and oranges, and the old cafeteria staple, canned fruit and vegetables, along with fresh root vegetables such as carrots and potatoes.

The menus will brighten with the first local produce. Asparagus will be May's featured vegetable.

"There will be kids who have never had it," Stricker said.



The sports season is in full swing at Brown Deer High School and, if you're a prep sports

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[Community Briefing](#)

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COPS CORNER

Police Department blog focuses on crime prevention

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