

Cabot School

Farm to School Testimony

February 12, 2020

My name is Peter Stratman and I teach at Cabot School in Cabot, Vermont. Our school is a grantee for the Farm to School Program for 2018-2020.

My name is Camryn Hoffman and I am in 8th Grade at Cabot School.

My name is Silas Robbins and I am in 8th Grade at Cabot School.

My name is Eileen Riley and I am a teacher at Cabot School.

Peter

At Cabot School, our goal is to design and implement learning experiences in which students investigate, research, build, and present work that intersects with the real world. We are striving to make Farm to School an integral part of that experience. Cabot's Farm to School program helps bring students and community members together—some whose families have been farming for generations and others who have never stepped foot in a barn or garden. These experiences are providing mirrors and windows for students to see themselves and their potential.

Cabot's campus is dotted with garden beds that serve as miniature outdoor classrooms. Students across grade levels plant flowers, herbs, and veggies. Last year's bounty included herbal tea, cucumbers, tomatoes, carrots, beets, kale, beans, pumpkins, watermelons, basil, spinach and more! Many items are integrated into Cabot's food program or special projects and students get to directly benefit from their efforts. Pizza from the bread oven with garden veggies may be one of the favorites.

Cabot Farm to School is helping us develop positive school culture. Students participate in community events and garden workdays where they take an active role in building community. This fosters a sense of belonging for students while offering unique opportunities for personalized learning.

The financial award and technical support provided by the Vermont Farm to School award has made a marked impact on our ability to enhance our academic programs and school culture. It's enabled us to expand staff and students' knowledge about sustainable agriculture, including how to make nutritious and delicious food choices. With the help of our coaches, Cabot's food service program is working to make fresh, local produce, meat, and dairy more available and developing a procurement model that has opened discussions for local/regional procurement across our new supervisory union.

Participating in Farm to School is also helping us cultivate partnerships with local farmers; we've received technical assistance from organizations including the Vermont Community Gardens Network, Shelburne Farms, and the Center for an Agricultural Economy; and we're developing a school-wide curriculum that integrates culinary arts, gardens, sustainability, the sciences, and community engagement.

Camryn

Day in the Dirt—A Community Garden Party

Building community is a core goal of our Cabot's Farm to School experiences. With that in mind, last fall, we held our first annual garden party in which students and members of the community came together for a garden workday called *Day in the Dirt*. Teams put the gardens to bed for the winter and began preparing for new projects in the spring. The first and second graders cleaned up the raspberry patch and tended to a few garden projects. Elementary and middle school students created an elderberry garden and cleaned out the veggie beds. Other teams laid the groundwork for a new perennial meditation garden. It was fantastic to see students of all ages working on campus together—and enjoying delicious Burt's cider and donuts!

This community event also provided a leadership opportunity for seventh and eighth graders, as we were the leaders of many small group projects throughout the day. The elementary students gained a deeper understanding of where our food comes from and the importance of a well-balanced diet. It was a nice break from the classroom setting, while still being an educational experience.

(Peter) Curriculum Connections

We are using Farm to School to provide new and unique opportunities for personalized learning. For example, preschool students and kindergarteners grew herbs to make tea; Elementary classrooms visited local orchards and farms; middle school explored sustainable food and built compost bins and furniture for garden spaces; and high school students produced a science-focused cookbook.

This fall, to help us enhance our curriculum and deepen Farm to School connections, teachers collaborated with educators from Shelburne Farms to facilitate learning experiences that focused on healthy eating, soil science, local agriculture, sustainability, and more. Lessons provided a variety of engaging, hands-on activities for students at all levels. Students made apple sauce, cheese, pancakes, and butter. And they investigated topics including local food production, pollinators, soil health and more. Teachers are developing a scope and sequence of lessons and investigations based on these elements. Later this spring, Cabot students will participate in farm-based workshops at Shelburne Farms that investigate ecology, sustainability,

nutritious food, and local agriculture. And, several classes are integrating Farm to School themes into extensive project based learning expeditions.

(Camryn) Sustainable Food Systems

The Middle School's first-trimester Project Based Learning Unit this year was entitled Farm to Plate: Redesigning America's Food System. We learned about the in's and out's of America's food system from sugarcane production to the beef industry. We investigated about the chemical reactions that occur when making artisan bread, learned about photosynthesis, and analyzed excerpts from Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. After we learned all this, we each designed an expert project - a specific topic to focus on for the remainder of the trimester. Exhibits included a podcast about factory farming, a cookbook made with *Vermont Harvest of the Month* recipes, a climate zone map showing where food comes from and its impact on the environment, along with much more! For my expert project, I chose to create a TED-style talk exploring the issues with the current fast food system and how we can solve them. This project as a whole helped our students learn about the benefits of nutritious local foods impacting our health and our community.

Silas

Bread Making + Community Harvest Supper

Cabot Farm to School is about much more than nutrition, curriculum, and gardens—it's about building community...learning and growing together. On November 2nd, Cabot Farm to School hosted a Community Harvest Supper. Cabot Chef Brock Miller and students K-8 worked together to prepare a delicious meal that included smoked local pork from Snug Valley Farm, chickens from Socks Family Farm, veggies from Bull Shed Farm, Cabot Smith Farm, Dancin' Carrot Farm, Carpenter-Pitkin Farm, Sunny Meadow Farm, tempeh from Rhapsody, as well as apples and cider from Burt's Orchard. Over 200 community members enjoyed a delicious meal and musical entertainment from Cabot School musicians and singers. We hope to make the event an annual tradition!

During this project, we studied the process of making artisan bread to give us some background knowledge for our project on sustainability. We learned about bread science— fermentation and how the yeast consumes the sugars, releasing CO₂ which makes the bread rise. We also learned why it's more sustainable to make your own bread, instead of buying the 50+ ingredient loaves of bread in the supermarkets. Our class made 30 loaves of bread for the harvest supper which supported not only the community but also allowed our class to have a hands-on activity that connected to our projects.

Another way the Farm to School Program has been integrated into student life is through our innovative middle school jobs program, **Cabot Leads**. Cabot Leads is a leadership program that

empowers student-voice, cultivates new skills, and provides authentic opportunities for personalized learning and taking an active role in the community.

All 5th through 8th-grade students apply for three posted jobs, write a cover letter and interview for those jobs. Positions range from working in the library to being a tech assistant, but there are a number of jobs each year that are part of our Farm to School program. We have students working in the kitchen every day, as well as assisting with special meals, students planning and maintaining the gardens, starting seeds and farm apprentices working at several local farms.

Eileen

Silas worked on the culinary team as a sixth-grader, and this year he is part of the Garden and Grounds team. Last year he apprenticed at Molly Brook Farm, a ninth-generation organic dairy with about 70 milking Jerseys and an international reputation for breeding stock. Silas and his team each followed a young calf from tagging to weaning to moving to the heifer barn. This year's team has met with the farm's veterinarian to learn about the milk cycle and reproduction. Every visit there are new opportunities to learn about animal health, the economics of managing a small farm and the history of agriculture in Cabot. Students clean calf pens, do other small tasks around the farm and get their questions answered. This has been a life-changing experience for our farm teams.

We have a number of relationships with local farms whose children and grandchildren attend Cabot School, and we are building more connections with greenhouse growers and other producers as part of our Farm to School program. Our farmers are keenly interested in passing on their knowledge to the next generation, and they enthusiastically give their time every week to share their love of farming. As Jen Churchill of Wonder Why Farm has said to me on more than one occasion, "Kids need to know where their food comes from, and how it is being produced in their own community."

Brock Miller, our chef and food service director, is a core member of the Farm to School team at Cabot and although he was unable to be here with you today, he is deeply committed to healthy food, sustainability, and farm partnerships. He has revolutionized our lunch and snack offerings. Participation in, and enthusiasm for, food served at Cabot is at an all-time high. Good food is a centerpiece of our community events and celebrations.

He offers this assessment of the Farm to School program:

Thus far our **Harvest Supper** has been the most impactful portion of our FTS experience. It was a way to involve nearly all the students in the school, many local farmers and a significant amount of the community in a one-night event that truly brought us together as a large family.

The FTS program funds spent on this meal enabled us to collect donations for future Harvest Suppers with a goal of making the event annual for many years beyond the grant. Students took ownership of their roles and still speak about this event as a time that they learned many things and felt like a part of the larger community. Without FTS, this would not have been possible.

Farm to School **technical assistance** has helped us build a stronger, wider network with the many small producers in our region, and this brings significant benefits to the local ag economy. Although we are a small school, we are surrounded by relatively small producers. Cabot School is potentially the largest customer for some of them and a major source of income for others.

Technical assistance has also made local purchasing accessible by creating bid templates that are user friendly for the purchaser as well as the farmer/producer. This is essential as procurement rules from USDA are very specific and confusing at times. These templates make the process less tedious for food service staff and farmers alike, who might otherwise choose not to participate if the process is too difficult and time-consuming to do so.

As a "Provision 2" (universal meals) school food program with a high participation rate, and a large amount of "full pay" students participating, the increase in reimbursement would have a tremendous effect on our ability to purchase locally and increase the quality of the ingredients we use.

I feel that universal meals are extremely important. Our community lives well below the poverty line, on average, and the school food program provides many of our students with their highest quality and consistent meals each week. Students receiving these meals, regardless of their family's ability to pay, is important on many levels. Erasing any stigmas of eating a "lesser quality" lunch, ensuring that all students are well nourished and able to concentrate and learn, and exposing students to food they may otherwise never get to try are just a few ways that universal meals are of the utmost importance.

(Peter)

We are grateful for the financial support, coaching, and technical assistance that comes with being a Farm to School grant recipient. This work is having a significant, positive impact on Cabot students and the broader community.

Thank you for investing in Vermont's farm economy and the Farm to School program. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to share some of our story with you here today.