

USDA official visits Quincy to hear about ‘Farm to School’ program

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QUINCY – Last year, they grew garlic. This year, it’s spinach. The students at Lincoln-Hancock Community School in Quincy have gardening beds right outside, and they take field trips to Holly Hill Farm in Scituate through a grant the city receives from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

On Wednesday, an official from the USDA visited the school to hear a presentation about the ways the district has used the \$72,000 in grants the city has received for “farm-to-school” efforts such as this.

Erin Healy, the director of the USDA’s Office of Community Food Systems, praised Quincy’s use of the grants.

“This is a perfect example of institutionalization of farm-to-school,” she said after the presentation at the Lincoln-Hancock School.

She said she has been going to schools around the country to promote Farm to School Month, which is October. Programs such as this one, often supported by the \$5 million that the federal agency gives out each year, are meant to teach young people more about what’s on their plates and how to grow it, she said.

“It really connects kids to where their food comes from,” she said.

Healy said it also has a positive effect on children’s eating habits.

“Research has shown it makes kids more likely to try new food and eat healthier,” she said.

At the presentation on Wednesday, educators and students at the K-4 school talked about how the children have been growing crops including garlic, spinach and kale right outside in the gardening beds.

“I learned that tomatoes and zucchinis need a lot more space between each other than carrots do,” said fourth-grader James Augustin, who participated in the program last year.

The Lincoln-Hancock School in West Quincy has four gardening beds on its grounds. Of the 19 Quincy public schools, Lincoln-Hancock is one of seven that has received the beds through a grant.

“This is a terrific thing,” said Quincy Schools Superintendent Richard DeCristofaro.

Quincy Mayor Thomas Koch attended the presentation, reading a proclamation that Wednesday was “Farm-to School Day” in the City of Presidents.

Jon Belber, the education director for Holly Hill Farm, hosts Quincy students on field trips and works with the schools.

“We’re going to try to get a garden in every school,” he said.

Holly Hill Farm and the school also has used the money to train food-service workers to handle fresh foods.

The USDA says about 42,000 schools have implemented farm-to-school programs. The USDA began the program in 2010. Schools that participate have less food waste and more kids eating fruits and vegetables, the agency says.

Healy, the USDA official, said agricultural studies can be rolled into science, math, art and other classes.

“There are so many ways to implement it into every subject’s curriculum,” she said.



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