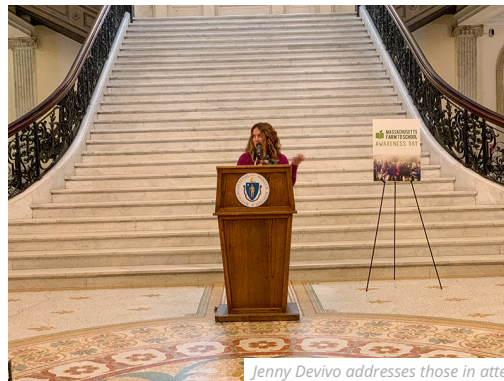


## 'Kale Blazer' reaps what she sowed

*Jenny Devivo was honored at State House by Massachusetts Farm to School.*

By **Josephine Brennan** - November 1, 2019

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*Jenny Devivo addresses those in attendance at the "Kale Blazer" awards.*

Three 2019 "Kale Blazers" were honored at the 2019 Farm to School Awareness Day Wednesday at the Massachusetts State House, including one from Martha's Vineyard. Massachusetts Farm to School put on a grand display to fit their venue at the base of the grand staircase at the State House, with tables from various organizations working on farm-to-school programs. The event empowered attendees to connect with legislators about the impact that locally grown and sourced food can have on youth in schools.

Jenny Devivo is the head chef and cafe director for Up-Island Regional Schools. In 2011, Devivo began to implement a farm- and sea-to-school program, which has gained success, earning her the title of 2019 Kale Blazer.

"This award has such a crazy name, and I love it," Devivo said, "I thought I was going to get kale thrown at me."

Kale was not thrown, but rather placed into her hands, as Horwitz and co-director of Massachusetts Farm to School Lisa Damon awarded Devivo with a framed certificate, and a floral bouquet that included kale.

"In 2011 I was gifted an opportunity to start, build, and move forward this initiative," said Devivo, accepting her award. "We source as much local food as possible, and make friends with the providers. The kids need to know the story of the food they are eating," she said.

Acknowledging students' place as the "stewards for the future," Devivo spoke of her work up-Island in providing not only farm-to-school dairy, fruit, and vegetable products, but sea-to-school food, sourced from local fishermen and sustainable



practices. “Find a fisherman,” she told the audience, imploring educators, legislators, and students in the room to take a chance on fish and the “incredible, beautiful story” that expanding students’ palates creates.

Devivo’s program has remarkable statistics, and was unique among honorees. In her remarks to the crowd, she spoke of serving more than 500 meals each Friday to students up-Island — Friday, of course, being the day that fish is served in the cafeteria.

“School lunch is lunch. It doesn’t have to be complicated,” said Devivo. She offers one hot lunch, examples being tacos or chicken, one sandwich option, and has a salad bar for students, eliminating confusion that can lead to poor choices, comparing the effect of that much choice on young students to that of a shopping mall food court. “Eliminate the mall mentality,” she implored those gathered.

Devivo praised the adventurous spirit of her Island students, noting that she hardly serves a single sandwich day to day. Harkening back to the childhood memories of mothers telling their kids what was for dinner, and that being the only choice, she urged, “These kids are amazing, and need time,” in trying new and unique foods.

In a district with nearly 40 percent free and reduced lunch, what Devivo does is remarkable, setting her apart from the many people nominated for the 2019 Kale Blazer Award to ultimately receive the honor. “It’s a simple implementation of farm- and sea-to-school, and serves as validation for the hard work done,” she said. “It’s an incredible honor, and I adore the other nominees.”

State Rep. Dylan Fernandes, D-Falmouth, congratulated Devivo in a tweet. “Jenny Devivo’s work getting local food into school lunches on Martha’s Vineyard is inspirational. Access to healthy and delicious food is an important part of student success,” he wrote.

Massachusetts Farm to School also honored Healthy Chelsea Youth Food Movement, and city councilor at large Michelle Wu of the Boston City Council alongside Devivo on Wednesday.

Wu was first to be honored, and noted her excitement in being recognized alongside Devivo and the Chelsea Youth Food movement. Wu was honored for her work with Boston Public Schools. The city council passed a groundbreaking food-justice ordinance earlier this year, the Good Food Purchasing Program, sponsored by Wu. “Even a small step makes a big difference,” she said of the farm-to-school movement’s slow and steady momentum.

Simca Horwitz, co-director of Massachusetts Farm to School, told the crowd that more than one-third of schools are now participating in the farm-to-school movement, and that, no pun intended, it continues to be a growing movement, backed by local organizations and state agencies.

In attendance on Wednesday were officials from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), who are currently working with Massachusetts Farm to School, as well as agencies at the federal level, such as certain divisions of the USDA.

Sen. Anne Gobi, chairperson of the Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture committee, and co-sponsor of S.301, a bill to establish farm-to-school grants to promote healthy eating and strengthen the agricultural economy, welcomed guests to Farm to School Awareness Day, remarking on the incredible feats of local communities to empower the movement. Following her remarks, co-sponsor Sen. Eric Lesser, co-chair of the Food System Caucus that was announced earlier this year, congratulated the recipients, and



spoke about the work being done across the state to improve and bolster the initiative that Devivo is credited in helping to pioneer. He urged attendees to lobby their representatives to support their cause.

Devivo said the concept of farm-to-school is not at all daunting, calling it “amazing,” and worth driving up I-93 in the school Prius, which she joked was rattling up to Boston. Excited to take her passion for locally sourced food around the country, Devivo’s energy is unwavering. “I love what I do,” she said.

