



Press Release
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Announcing the 2021 Massachusetts Farm to School Kale Blazers

STATEWIDE (Massachusetts) Oct. 27, 2021 - As Farm to School Month comes to a close, Massachusetts Farm to School recognizes individuals who are leaders in the movement to bring healthy, locally grown foods and food education to students across the Commonwealth. This year's Kale Blazers are **Dave Dumaresq (Farmer Dave's)**, **YouthGROW**, an agriculture-focused youth development program in Worcester, **Christine Esposito**, Cafeteria Manager at Webster Middle School, **Jane Rice**, Cook Manager at Taylor Elementary (Foxborough), **Anna Cynar**, Farm to School Coordinator & Science Teacher at Innovation Academy (Tyngsborough), and **Leila Tunnell**, Garden Educator at Amherst-Pelham Regional Public Schools.

The Massachusetts Farm to School Kale Blazer is an individual (or group of individuals) who has demonstrated excellence and leadership in farm to school activity in Massachusetts. "Through the Kale Blazer award, we are honored to recognize the local heroes who are changing the food system in Massachusetts. From providing training and agricultural skills to youth to adapting new methods of growing and preparing food in school cafeterias, to impacting schools' food sourcing and purchasing practices, the 2021 Farm to School Kale Blazers are an inspiration to us all," said Mass. Farm to School Co-Director, Simca Horwitz.

Kale Blazer Award Winners

Dave Dumaresq, *Farmer Dave's (Dracut)* has travelled extensively, sharing his knowledge and learning from others about farming in Ecuador, Georgia, and Ethiopia. He's worked closely with the Lowell Public Schools and Mill City Grows to support the Harvest of the Month program and provide local fruits and vegetables for Lowell Public School cafeterias. Alissa Haskins (Mill City Grows/FoodCorps) says Dave has, "been a great partner in our community." Beyond providing produce, Alissa shares that he also, "offers programming to students on his farm," allowing for students to make a direct connection between the farm and their cafeteria meals.

YouthGROW, a program of the Regional Environmental Council, is an urban agriculture-focused youth development and employment program for Worcester teens. Maintaining two urban organic farms, along with participating in a focused curriculum, allows for youth to gain leadership, job, and agriculture skills. YouthGrow goes beyond simply providing training to teens, but they incorporate youth into the decision-making process when developing and adapting their programs.

Christine Esposito, *Cafeteria Manager at Webster Middle School (Webster, MA)* is someone who embraces the challenge of new ingredients, new recipes, and new cooking techniques. Ellen Nylen (Food Service Director, Webster Public Schools) says, “she has enthusiastically embraced local procurement... prioritizing what we can afford to purchase locally, a process which adds a significant amount of work to [her] day.” Her dedication to local sourcing and her sense of adventure in the kitchen is a gift to the students who eat in her cafeteria.

Jane Rice, *Cook Manager, Taylor Elementary School (Foxborough, MA)* is a farm to school leader in the Foxborough district. She has embraced the Tower Garden Program where lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, and herbs are grown and eaten in the cafeteria. Beyond maintaining the tower gardens, she has provided training to other staff members on how to care for their gardens in other schools. Her enthusiasm has inspired students and staff and helped Foxborough to receive an education grant allowing Jane to present garden lessons to students.

Anna Cynar, *Farm to School Coordinator & Science Teacher, Innovation Academy (Tyngsborough)* started her school’s farm to school program from scratch three years ago. In that time, she’s developed a program that is inclusive and pervasive throughout the school. She not only maintains gardens and a greenhouse, but developed a Farm to School internship program for students, and creates opportunities for learning at all grade levels. Her colleague, Gale Stafford says, “Anna truly sees farm-to-school as a bridge between the school, our students' lives outside of school, and our local landscape as well. She is a true visionary of creating programs, opportunities, connections, space for questions, learning, and inclusion.”

Leila Tunnell, *Garden Educator, Amherst-Pelham Public Schools* uses school gardens as not only an educational experience, but also as a way to build community. Centering students in her lessons, she connects to students and families by sharing food based stories and looking for ways to create an inclusive and welcoming environment. Gale Stafford says, “she has been instrumental in incorporating multiple languages into garden lessons, signage and communications, and she plans her lessons with an equity lens, noticing which voices/experiences are centered and ways that that may need to shift.”

Founded in 2004, Massachusetts Farm to School has been at the forefront of the nationwide farm to school movement. Over 1/3 of the state’s school districts provide access to healthy, local foods and spend an estimated \$11.4 million annually on Massachusetts produced food.

Farm to School programs have exploded across the country in recent years, with a wide range of impacts on local economies, student health, and learning. Massachusetts has been at the forefront of this movement, with a strong statewide program since 2004. The U.S.D.A.’s Farm to School Census finds that Massachusetts school districts are helping 595,000 students gain access to healthy, local foods and helping school cafeterias spend an estimated \$11.4 million on Massachusetts produced food.

For more information about Massachusetts Farm to School visit, www.massfarmtoschool.org.