



# Taste Testing 101

November 6, 2024



# Agenda

1. Introductions
2. Why Taste Tests Work
3. Case Studies: Acton-Boxborough, Chicopee & Northampton
  - a. Development: Idea, Menu & Student Engagement
  - b. Execution: Scheduling & Tools
  - c. Feedback: Receiving and Sharing Results
  - d. Incorporation
4. Resources/Questions

## Today's Presenters:

### **Bryanna Ippolito**

*Pronouns: she, her, hers*  
Nutrition Coordinator,  
Food and Nutrition Services,  
Acton-Boxborough Regional School  
District

### **Bryan Jersky**

*Pronouns: he, him, his*  
Farm to School Coordinator  
Northampton Public Schools &  
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### **Brianna Jackson**

*Pronouns: she, her, hers*  
Farm to School Coordinator,  
Food and Nutrition Services,  
Chicopee Public Schools & Chicopee  
FRESH

# Massachusetts Farm to School

Mass. Farm to School strengthens local farms and fisheries and promotes healthy communities by increasing local food purchasing and education at schools.

Get involved through our:

- Professional learning opportunities
- Networking
- Policy/Advocacy
- Communications



# About



Acton Boxborough Food and Nutrition Services Department aims to serve high quality and nutritious breakfast & lunch meals daily to ensure well fed children are ready to learn



Chicopee FRESH strives to serve healthy and appetizing school meals that leave students energized and ready to learn, sourcing 15% of food from local farms in order to support the local food economy and provide students with fresh, high quality meals.



Freshampton aims to provide every student in the Northampton Public School District access to healthy, local food, in addition to opportunities for food-based education, by improving student participation, choice, and voice, and by empowering students to champion the environment and local community.



# Why Taste Tests Work

## Taste Tests:

1. Provide Transparency
2. Build Trust
3. Foster Positive Relationships
4. Grow Adventurous Eaters



*Taste Tests are Excellent Opportunities for Student Engagement, Staff Relations & Overall Program Marketing*

# Acton Boxborough "TryDay" Development

## Beginning Stages

1. Harvest of the Month Program
2. Finding Recipes
3. Trial & Error
  - ❖ Not all taste test methods work at each site

## Finding Local Produce

Food Hubs, DOD Produce

## Supplies

- Trays
- 2# boats
- 2 or 4 oz cups
- Stickers
- Giveaways

## Marketing Materials

Canva , Social Media Posts



# “Tryday” Development cont.

## Taste Tests Outside the Department

- Bring in local vendors and have them promote their products!
- Tie in Harvest of the Month through vendor taste tests
- Use vendor marketing materials when showcasing food on menu
- Chef Andrew and Sea-weedish Meatballs for May Harvest of the Month

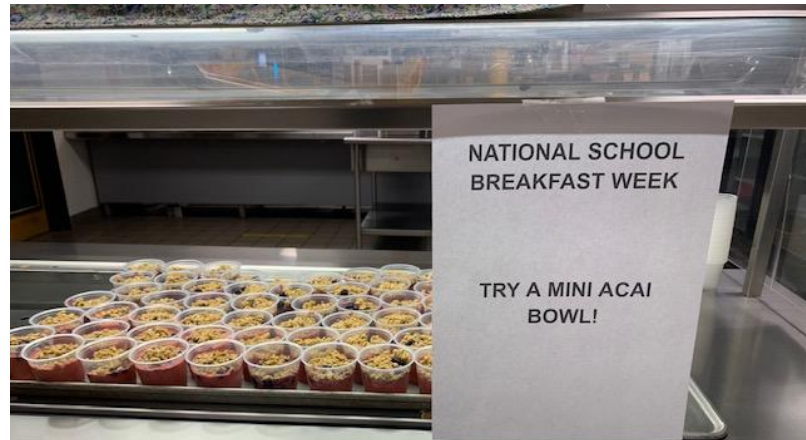




# Execution of Taste Tests

## Setting Up

- ❖ Best location for the taste test
  - On the line OR in the cafe?
- ❖ Staff involvement
  - Who is helping put this together?
- ❖ Pre-fill your trays with samples to have them ready to go
- ❖ The students are excited to see something new, so if you need to adjust your plan for better results, go for it!





# Forms of Feedback

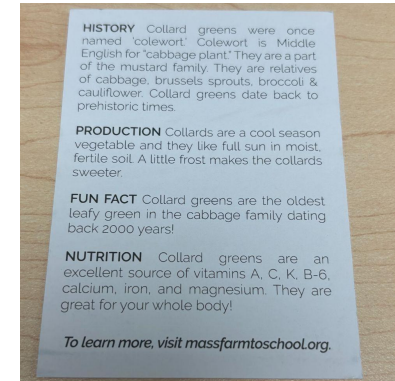
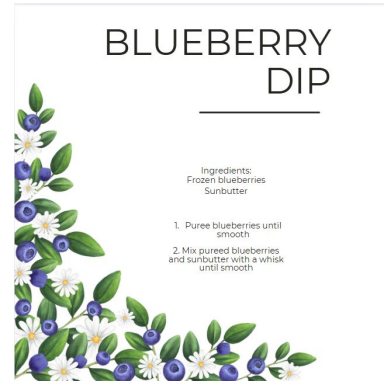
## Student Feedback

1. Keeping it positive - not "I didn't like this" but "maybe next time"
2. Simple means of keeping track - tallies, stickers, containers with countable objects, QR codes
3. There is no such thing as a "failed" taste test



## Nutrition Education

- Small teachable moments
- Recipe cards to bring home
- Educational sheets



# Taste Test Takeaways

At Acton-Boxborough, taste tests aim to create a fun, interactive cafeteria experience where students can try new foods without pressure.

- Taste tests are not only for new menu items! They aim to support the food services program, by offering students the opportunity to try new things
- Successful recipes that end up on the menu have been tested at multiple sites, are well liked by students, and fit the needs of the menu each month.
- Taste tests can be whatever you'd like them to be - it is fun event for food service staff and students alike!



# ChicopeeFRESH Harvest of the Month Taste Tests

## Important Questions to Consider:

What is your goal for the taste test?



What do you want to showcase?



What do you know about your audience?



Who will be helping you?





# Marketing and Communication

## Marketing Ideas:

- Email principal with an announcement about TT
- Signage for the caf/lunch line
- Handouts
- Stickers (all ages LOVE stickers)
- Table decor (if you're using a table)

## Communicate with kitchen:

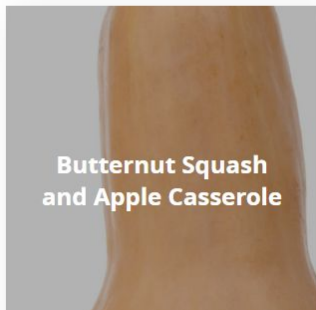
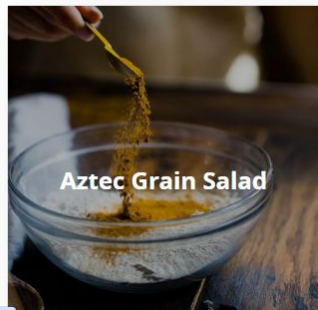
- Proposed Date
- Recipe
- Allergens
- Pantry items you need
- Your arrival time
- Any special guests coming?





# Recipe Selection

massfarmtoschool.org/guide-types/recipes/page/2/?harvest=Winter%20Squash



## Garlic Parmesan Roasted Potatoes

Chef Sam Icklan, Project Bread

Side

School Lunch

# Ordering Ingredients

## Example: Cinnamon Baked Pears



2023-2025 Recipe Math

.XLSX



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	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1		6 servings	1 serving	1 sample	sample x 150		
2	Pears (indiv)	5	0.8333333333	0.2083333333	31.25	15.625	<- in lbs
3	Lemon	0.5	0.0833333333	0.0208333333	3.125		
4	Oil (tbsp)	1	0.1666666667	0.0416666667	6.25		
5	Cinnamon (tsp)	1	0.1666666667	0.0416666667	6.25		
6	Sugar (tbsp)	1	0.1666666667	0.0416666667	6.25		
7	Salt (tsp)	0.125	0.0208333333	0.0052083333	0.78125		
8							
9	<a href="https://kathleenashmore.com/wprm_print/cinnamon-baked-pears">https://kathleenashmore.com/wprm_print/cinnamon-baked-pears</a>						
10							

# Pre-planning: Outfit, Packing, Delegating, Timing

1. What are you wearing?
2. Any ingredients, decorations, signage, or special equipment you need to bring to the kitchen?
3. Roles and responsibilities of whoever is assisting with the taste test
4. When are you arriving, based on your timings and when lunch starts?
5. How will you keep your samples at temp?

School	Visit #1	Visit #2	Visit #3	Lunch Start	Lunch End
BARRY	9/15	2/9		11:00 AM	1:00 PM
BELCHER	9/22	5/10		11:30 AM	12:25 PM
BELLAMY	12/1	-		10:45 AM	12:15 PM
BOWE	9/29	5/17		11:15 AM	1:00 PM
BOWIE	10/6	5/24		11:45 AM	1:15 PM
CHS	1/12	-		11:15 AM	12:36 PM
COMP	1/19	-		11:06 AM	12:27 PM
ACADEMY	TBD	-		11:15 AM	12:33 PM
DUPONT	2/2	-		10:50 AM	12:20 PM
FVMES	10/13	5/31		11:30 AM	1:00 PM
LL	10/20	5/30		11:30 AM	1:00 PM
LITWIN	10/27	6/14		11:00 AM	1:00 PM
STEFANIK	11/3	5/23		11:30 AM	1:00 PM
STREIBER	11/9	6/7		11:30 AM	1:00 PM
SZETELA	11/17	-		11:30 AM	1:00 PM

## Tips For Successful Taste Tests:

- Have fun
- Ask for help (within reason)
- Stick to the plan but also be flexible :)
- Communicate with EVERYONE about allergens and consult the kitchen's allergy lists
  - \*Cross-reactivity
- Ask questions and be curious about student feedback
- Take pictures! Be aware of school social media policy if you post student's faces. Fun solutions = emojis over faces

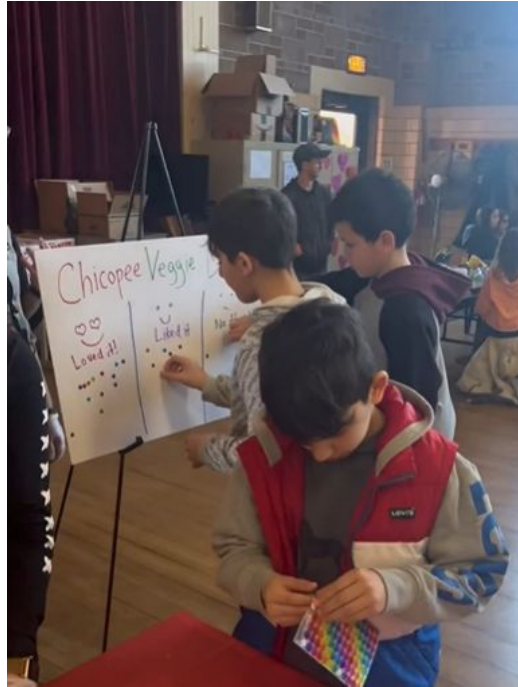




# Feedback: Results and Incorporation

## What was learned?

- Any changes to the recipe before the next taste test?
- Is this a recipe we should try on the menu?
- Share photos on social media
- Work with your food service director on next steps



chicopeefresh

Giulio Cercato • Midnight In Tokyo



chicopeefresh Yesterday we were honored to welcome Erin McAleer, president and CEO of Project Bread, for a visit to Bowie School and a taste test of a yogurt dip made with our homemade spice blend! We are working on this with Chef Sherry from Project Bread, and are perfecting a spice blend that can be used in many ways- on roasted veggies, meats, on a snack mix, or mixed with yogurt to use as a dip. We served the dip with a mix of pretzels 🍪 and fresh veggies including carrots 🥕 cucumbers 🥒 peppers 🌶️ and cherry tomatoes 🍅

The results of our taste test:

Loved it 😍 68

Liked it 😊 35

Not for me 😞 32

We'd say those are pretty great results! Thank you SO MUCH to Erin McAleer, Chef Sam, and Chef Sherry for their visit! ❤️

⋮

# Freshampton Development: Idea, Menu & Student Engagement

**Step 1:** Schedule monthly taste test dates and send to Principals for review

- Keep in mind half days, holidays, etc.



**Step 2:** Meet with food services director to brainstorm taste test ideas. Keep in mind:

- Harvest of the Month
- Goals (new menu item, just something new to try)
- Preparation and serving challenges
- Allergies, etc).

Date	F2S Taste Test Schedule	Status
<b>September 2024</b>		
<b>Tomatoes</b>		
Wed Sep 18, 2024	JFK Open House	Completed
Thu Sep 19, 2024	NHS Open House	Completed
Tue Sep 24, 2024	Leeds Open House	Completed
Wed Sep 25, 2024	JSS/Ryan Road Open House	Completed
Thu Sep 26, 2024	Bridge Open House	Completed
<b>October 2024</b>		
<b>Apples</b>		
Wed Oct 9, 2024	Bridge	Completed
Fri Oct 11, 2024	Ryan	Completed
Tue Oct 15, 2024	JSS	Completed
Thu Oct 17, 2024	Leeds	Completed
<b>November 2024</b>		
<b>Winter Squash</b>		
Mon Nov 4, 2024	Bridge	Completed
Thu Nov 7, 2024	Ryan	
Tue Nov 12, 2024	JSS	
Wed Nov 13, 2024	Leeds	
<b>December 2024</b>		
<b>Cranberries</b>		
Mon Dec 9, 2024	Bridge	
Wed Dec 11, 2024	Ryan	
Tue Dec 17, 2024	JSS	
Thu Dec 19, 2024	Leeds	
<b>January 2025</b>		
<b>Carrots</b>		
Tue Jan 7, 2025	Bridge	
Thu Jan 9, 2025	Ryan	

# Freshampton Development: Idea, Menu & Student Engagement

## Step 3: Source Ingredients:

- Local
- DoD
- Distributor
- Direct from Farm

## Step 4: Design Marketing Material

- Harvest of the Month Flyer
- Recipe Card for Taste Test Day
- Recipe Card for Social Media



**Sweet Butternut Squash and Apple Bake**

**Ingredients**

- 1 small butternut squash
- 1 large apple, peeled, cored, sliced
- 2 Tbsp of brown sugar
- 2 Tbsp of butter, slightly softened
- 1 tsp of all purpose flour
- 1/2 tsp of table salt
- 1/4 tsp of cinnamon, ground
- 1/4 tsp of nutmeg, ground

**Directions**

1. Peel squash, scoop out seeds, and cut into bite size pieces
2. Place squash and apple slices in a 8 x 8" in pan
3. Blend remaining ingredients with fork or pastry cutter until crumbly.
4. Distribute evenly over squash and apples.
5. Cover and bake casserole at 350°F (325°F convection oven) for about 45 to 50 minutes.

Adapted from the John Stalker Institute

**November**

**Harvest of the Month**

**Squash**



# Freshampton Development: Idea, Menu & Student Engagement

## Step 5: Materials

- Serving cups, bowls, etc
- Tablecloth
- Voting baskets
- Voting blocks
- "I tried it" stickers
- Harvest of Month cards
- Scissors
- Tape
- Small chalkboard signs
- Chalk
- Taste Test A-Frame
- Table Runner
- Gloves
- Trays
- Towels
- Table





# Freshampton Execution

1. Prep and Cook!
2. Freeze or Refrigerate
3. Let school know you're coming and if you need anything (oven space, tables, etc)
4. Arrive and warm up food (if needed)
5. Set up table
6. Students take a sample, go back to their table, taste, come back to vote and get a sticker
7. Every school is different:
  - o Students come to table after getting their lunch
  - o Students are excused one table at a time
  - o Go table to table for Kindergarteners if needed



# Freshampton Feedback: Receiving and Sharing Results

- Listen to student feedback and jot down notes
- Count votes
- Send a recap with votes and photos to Principals to send out in newsletter
- Post recap with photos on social media
- Post in Parent Square





# Freshampton Feedback: Incorporation

- Incorporate into menu if it was a winner!
- Teach or help staff prep if needed

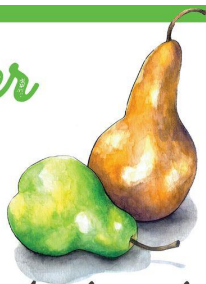




# Harvest of the Month Materials

## HARVEST *of the* MONTH

October



*This month we are enjoying local pears in our school meals!*

THE EDICOTT PEAR TREE IN DANVERS, MA IS AMERICA'S OLDEST FRUIT TREE. IT WAS PLANTED IN ABOUT 1623.

PEARS RIPEN OFF THE TREE, AFTER THEY ARE PICKED. IT TAKES A TREE FOUR YEARS TO START PRODUCING FRUIT.

PEARS ARE A GOOD SOURCE OF VITAMIN C AND FIBER. AND THEY'RE FAT-FREE!

Facebook Graphic

MASSACHUSETTS  
FARM TO SCHOOL

## October HARVEST *of the* MONTH PEARS



Harvest of the Month promotes a different MA-grown crop from local farms each month in school cafeterias across the state. To learn more, visit: [massfarmtoschool.org/hotm](http://massfarmtoschool.org/hotm)

Pears give kids lots of energy, helping them learn and play all day long!

### Healthy Serving Ideas

**Ginger Roasted Pears, Beets, and Potatoes:** Mix 2 chopped pears, 1 chopped sweet potato, and 2 chopped beets with 1 Tbsp. chopped ginger and 1 Tbsp. chopped garlic, and 1 Tbsp. olive oil. Spread on baking sheet and bake for 15 minutes at 400°F.

**Sautéed Pears:** Chop pears, cook on the stove with cinnamon and a little water until soft. They are a great addition to muffins, pancakes, or yogurt.

**Pear Quesadillas:** Sprinkle pepper jack or cheddar cheese on a whole wheat tortilla and add pears (sliced thin), heat in a pan over medium until cheese is melted.

### Where to Find Local Pears

MassGrown Map (MDAR)  
<https://massnrc.org/farmlocator>

### Harvest of the Month Book Club

Gr. K-5: *Are We Pear Yet?* by Miranda Paul  
Gr. 6-8: *Growing Good Food* by Anne Flounders  
Gr. 9-12: *Who Really Feeds the World* by Vandana Shiva

### Fun Facts

- Every pear in the U.S. is hand picked.
- The Edicott pear tree in Danvers, MA is America's oldest fruit tree. It was planted between 1623 and 1649.
- Pears ripen off the tree, after they are picked.

### At-Home Activity

*Learn about the Pear Life Cycle*

Visit the below link to download a workbook to learn about the Pear Life Cycle. You'll find worksheets for (K-2):

- labeling the different parts of the life cycle
- drawing & writing about seeds, trees, and fruit
- pear coloring pages
- pear math sheets

<http://bit.ly/Pear-Activity>



Thank you to Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts and the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources for helping make Harvest of the Month possible.



### Pear Purchasing Pointers

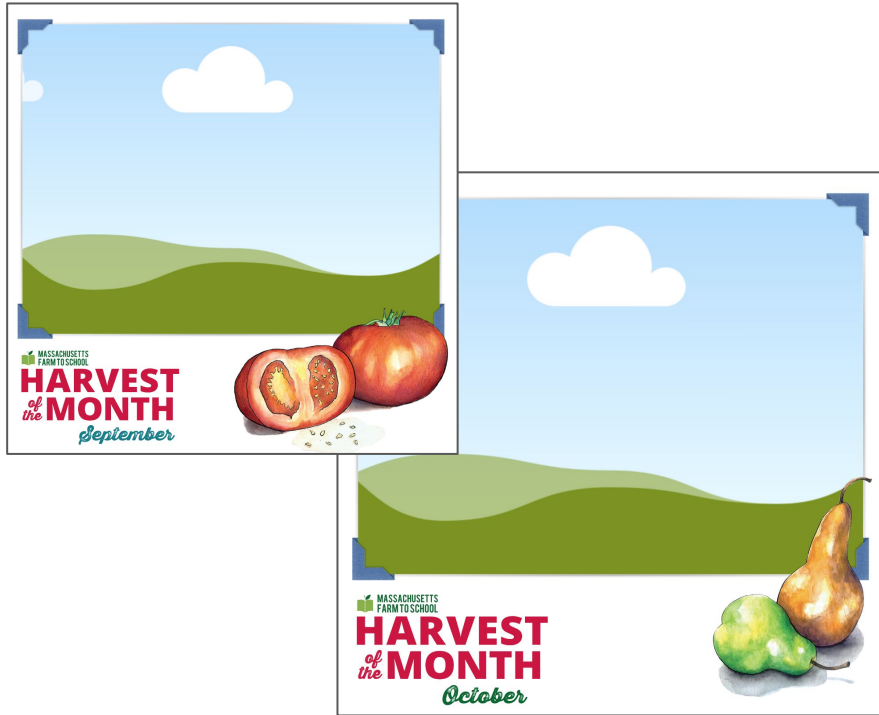
- Look for pears without bruises.
- Pears are ripe when the area near the stem feels soft when pressed.
- Pears ripen best at room temperature.

November Preview: Kale!

[www.massfarmtoschool.org](http://www.massfarmtoschool.org)

Family Newsletter

# Harvest of the Month: Graphic Templates & More



Harvest of the Month  
[Instagram Templates](#)



Harvest of the Month  
[Cafeteria Line Local Food Sign Templates](#)

## [SY24-25 Workshops & Events](#)

*(Use QR Code to View Full Calendar & Register)*

- **December 4:** Cleaning your Hydroponics System
- **February 6:** Meal Costing 101
- **March 19:** Fresh, Local Summer Food Service
- **Coming This Spring:** *Food Hub Tours!*





# Questions



# Presenter Contact Information



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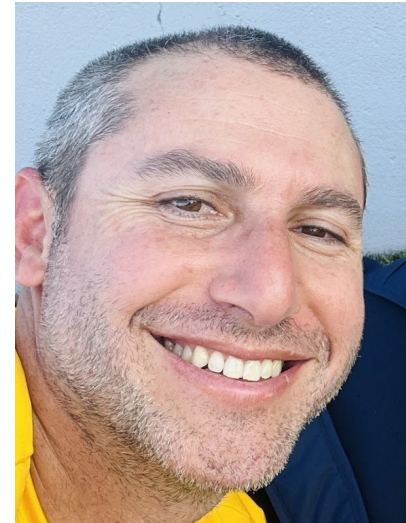


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