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Local Food Ambassador

Test Your Tastebuds Toolkit

#TestYourTastebudsRI

This program has been designed to create a volunteer network of Local Food Ambassadors to conduct school cafeteria taste tests in RI schools.

Taste testing raises awareness and support for important Farm to School activities within the school community and increases consumption of locally grown produce!

WELCOME TO THE PROGRAM
&
THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING!



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Developed in 2017 for the
Local Food Ambassador program
by RI Healthy Schools Coalition
and Farm Fresh RI.

Many thanks to the following
for information and inspiration:

- USDA Food and Nutrition Service
Growing Minds
- South Carolina Farm to School
- Vermont FEED
- Wisconsin Dept. of Public Instruction



WHAT IS A FARM TO SCHOOL TASTE TEST?

A Farm to School taste test is an event that offers students small samples of fresh, nutritious and **LOCALLY GROWN** fruits or vegetables during school lunch hours in the cafeteria.

Samples of locally grown produce (or a recipe featuring them) are purchased by school food service and offered to students at a designated table in the cafeteria or by passing samples out to each lunch table.



WHY HOST A FARM TO SCHOOL TASTE TEST?

Kids can be picky eaters and their taste buds are changing and evolving over time. Taste testing is a great way to introduce new foods in a pressure-free environment, letting kids experience the smell, texture and flavor of an unfamiliar variety of fruits and vegetables or a new recipe.

Taste Testing is also a great tool for a food service program looking to make healthy changes to its menu at minimum cost. Having students try a new food and making sure it's well-received cuts down on food waste when it is offered on the menu.

Why is Farm to School so IMPORTANT?

Farm to School enriches the connection communities have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers by changing food purchasing and education practices at schools.

FARM TO SCHOOL TASTE TESTS...

... **GIVE STUDENTS** the opportunity to try nutritious foods, maybe for the first time!

... **ENCOURAGE YOUNG PEOPLE** to enjoy fruits and vegetables from an early age, which is instrumental in developing healthy eating habits that will last a lifetime.

... **ARE FUN & MEMORABLE** experiences for students, creating positive food environments and involving them in the choice to enjoy fresh fruits and vegetables in their school meal.

... **HELP BUILD COMMUNITY** among school food service providers, families, school staff, Local Food Ambassadors, and (of course) the students!

#TestYourTastebudsRI

Good communication is the key to a successful event.

Be sure to involve food service staff
(beginning with your district's Food Service Director),
school administration and staff, cafeteria staff, families
and the taste testers themselves, STUDENTS!

Communicating with EVERYONE is essential for generating buy-in and enthusiasm!

- Farm to School staff at Farm Fresh RI can help you connect with your Food Service Director and cafeteria staff to start planning and guide you through the process. Many variables must be discussed with them, including the ordering of local produce, cafeteria space, schedule, supplies and staffing.
- Communication with school principal, teachers, staff and families will ensure you get additional support. Be sure to use as many communication channels as you can — school newsletters, listserv emails, morning announcements, school/district social media — to let them know what's happening and when. *(Sample messages are included on pages 8-9 of this toolkit.)*
- Encourage staff to stop in the cafeteria to try the sampled items on the day of the Taste Test — be positive role models and discuss with students after lunch!
- Talk to the most important participants — students! — about their taste-testing experience.



Taste Test Tasks & Timeline Checklist

Date of Taste Test: _____ Featured item: _____

District: _____ School: _____

1 MONTH BEFORE THE TASTE TEST

Target Date: _____

- Contact your district Food Service Director and school principal to begin the planning process and select a date. The FSD will select a local food/recipe to sample and order the local produce through the school food service account. Contact Farm to School staff if you need help: farmtoschool@farmfreshri.org
- We encourage you to recruit at least one other volunteer (if not two!) to join you in the taste test activities—fellow parent, teacher or an older student. (Check with your school on its BCI policy for volunteers.)
- VERY IMPORTANT:** Be aware of student food allergies by checking with the school nurse. Know which students cannot be served a sample because of a food allergy or offer an alternative, if possible.
- Review “Communication is Key” page of this toolkit—let everyone know about the taste test!
- Ask the Food Service Director for stickers to reward students who try a sample! Or contact Farm to School staff at farmtoschool@farmfreshri.org

1 WEEK BEFORE THE TASTE TEST

Target Date: _____

- Send a suggested morning announcement to the principal. Ask the principal to make the cafeteria supervisory staff aware of the event. *Sample email to principal, along with sample morning announcement language is included in this toolkit.*
- Consider sharing some fun facts about the featured food with the students on the day of the Taste Test. Refer to our Fruit & Veggie Fun Facts Sheets in this toolkit and/or explore this website full of information on a wide variety of fruits and vegetables: www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/fruit-vegetable-nutrition-database
- Check with food service to confirm food to be sampled and supplies to be used (cups, gloves, utensils) are ordered or on-hand. Ask about source farm information if available and double-check that the samples will be prepared for you when the first lunch begins. *Sample email to Food Service Director is included in this toolkit.*
- Request a microphone for your use at the Taste Test if one is available—cafeterias can be loud!
- Publicize the Taste Test in any way you can: morning announcements, email to families, email to staff, school newsletter, flyers in hallway and cafeteria and social media.

Taste Test Tasks & Timeline Checklist

DAY OF THE TASTE TEST:

- Sign in at the main office at least 30 minutes before the first lunch period starts. Find your food service staff contact, who will help you with setup of your tasting table and food samples.
- MAKE SURE HANDS ARE CLEAN AND GLOVED BEFORE HANDLING FOOD.**
- Make an announcement about the Taste Test to the students at the beginning of each lunch period and perhaps share some information and fun facts about the food being tasted (and the farm it came from, if available). This is when the microphone is really helpful! *Sample language for introducing the event at the beginning of each lunch is included in this toolkit.*
- Share samples of the featured item at your table and/or offer to students sitting at their tables using a tray. Consider having a whole unprocessed example of the fruit or vegetable being sampled (or in the recipe) at the table so that kids can see and touch foods in their original form.
- Smile and praise! Encourage students to try the samples, but don't push. Give students who taste a sticker (if available) as a "thank you" for participating. Trying new foods can be scary and those who do deserve some praise! *Sample language for encouraging students to try new foods is included in this toolkit.*
- Ask "tasters" about the featured item and their tasting experience. Include any observations on your Taste Test Info Sheet in the NOTES section.
- If you take photos to share your event with your school community and/or on social media, remember that **the photos must be cleared by the principal in accordance with parental releases**. If you share on social media, please use the hashtag #TestYourTastebudsRI! *Sample social media post is included in this toolkit.*
- Remember to thank the Food Service Director and cafeteria staff when the event is over!

1-3 DAYS AFTER THE TASTE TEST

Target Date: _____

- Share any feedback from the Taste Test with Food Service Director, even if it's just a quick email.
- Think about planning the next tasting! Consider hosting a tasting regularly—monthly or bi-monthly or even just seasonally, depending on budget and scheduling. Make the taste tests a consistent occurrence at your school.

THANK YOU for hosting a Taste Test!

Taste Test Info Sheet

Fill out this sheet and take it with you to your Taste Test. After your event, scan or take a photo of your completed sheet and email to farmtoschool@farmfreshri.org.

Date of Taste Test: ___ / ___ / ___ District: _____ School: _____

Local Food Ambassadors

Local Food Ambassador Name:

Email:

Home School:

1.	_____	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____	_____

Food Service

Food Service Director Name: _____ Company: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Cafeteria Contact Name: _____

Featured food item: _____ Source Farm: _____

Taste Test Details

Lunch
Periods:

	Start time	End time	Grades	# of students	Total # of samples	# tasted (start minus end counts)
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						
5.						
TOTALS						

general observations, likes/dislikes from tasters, comments from students, issues encountered, etc.

Notes

1. Sample email to *school principal* 1 WEEK BEFORE THE TASTE TEST

I am looking forward to our Taste Test on (*date*)!

Could you help with the following:

- Please let school staff and cafeteria supervisory staff know that the Taste Test is taking place—it would be great to have them encourage the kids to be tasters, and I may need the help of supervisory staff to get the kids' attention in the cafeteria to introduce myself.
- Please consider including the Taste Test in your morning announcements on the morning of the event and perhaps the day before. I've included the language below just as a suggestion for your convenience.

Sample morning announcement (customize for your Taste Test event):

There's a special event — a Taste Test — happening in our cafeteria during all lunch periods (*today/tomorrow*)! We have a guest Local Food Ambassador visiting us to tempt your tastebuds with a sample of local (*food item being tested*).

Be sure to try a sample and let (*her/him*) know what you think. Students who taste will get a special sticker as a thank you! (*If you have stickers to distribute*)

2. Sample email to *Food Service Director* 1 WEEK BEFORE THE TASTE TEST

I am looking forward to our Taste Test on (*date*)! I wanted to check in with you to make sure we are ready to go, with all food and necessary supplies ordered or on-hand. And I do have a few questions:

- Will the volunteers be plating the samples themselves, or will your cafeteria staff have the capacity to prepare the samples for the LFA's?
- Will there be a table for our LFA's to use for the tasting?
- Is it possible to have a whole, unprocessed (*fruit or vegetable being sampled*) there so that the kids can see it in its natural uncut form?

I will be at the school 30 minutes before lunch begins to connect with your food service staff and get organized at my table with the prepared samples. Should I ask for a specific staff member when I arrive?

3. Sample language for introducing the event at the beginning of each lunch

Hi everyone, how are you doing today?

My name is _____ and my friends and I are here today with a very special treat! Your cafeteria worked with a RI farmer to get the food that they grew on their farm into your school lunch! That's pretty cool.

The special treat we have for you today is (*food item being sampled*) from (*farm name*)! Have any of you ever had (*food item being sampled*) before? For those of you who haven't tried it before, you'll get the chance to try it today!

But we need everyone's help today; we need to let the farmer know if they should keep growing their (*food item being sampled*). Do you think that you can try (*food item being sampled*) and let us know what you think? And, if you try the sample today, you can get a sticker for trying it! Doesn't that sound awesome?! Keep eating your lunch and we'll come around to each table and ask if you'd like a sample!

4. Sample language for encouraging students to try new foods

- Try it and let me know what you think! We have to let the farmer know if they should keep growing (*food item being sampled*).
- What are some words you would use to describe this food to your family or friends?
- Did you know you sometimes need to try something 10 times to figure out if you like it?
- I understand that you may have had (*food item being sampled*) before, but you might not have had it made in the same way with the same ingredients! Try it and let me know if it tastes different!

5. Sample social media post

Today at _____ Elementary School, our Local Food Ambassadors offered students and staff samples of (*food item being sampled*)! The students loved it and encourage the farmer to continue growing it! #testyourtastebudsRI

(Include a photo of the samples, adults with the samples and/or students tasting them IF THE PHOTOS OF THE STUDENTS HAVE BEEN APPROVED by the principal.)

Fruit and Veggie Fun Facts



- Tomatoes increase in weight as they ripen, even after harvesting.
- Tomatoes are usually red but they can be yellow, green, purple, orange & black.

- The longest carrot ever grown was over 19 feet long!
- Carrots can be 5 different colors: red, orange, yellow, purple and white!



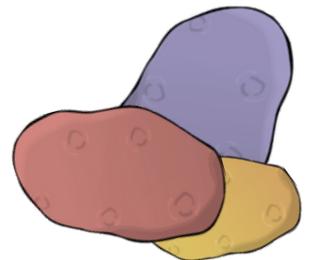
- Cooking kale doesn't take away any of its nutritional value!
- One cup of chopped kale has 134 percent of your recommended daily intake of vitamin C, while a medium orange has 113 percent of the daily C requirement

- Butternut squash, pumpkins and cucumbers are all in the same plant family.
- Butternut squash seeds can be roasted and eaten. This is a great way to prevent food waste.



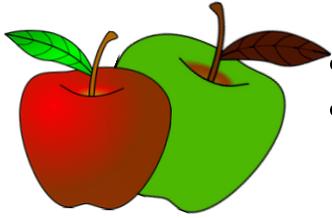
- Peppers are actually fruits because they come from flowering plants and have seeds!
- Peppers can be so many different colors. Aside from red, orange, yellow and green, they can also be brown, white and even dark purple!

- Potatoes are high in vitamin C and a good source of potassium
- There are seven different kinds of potatoes that are grown in the United States, with the most popular being russet potatoes.



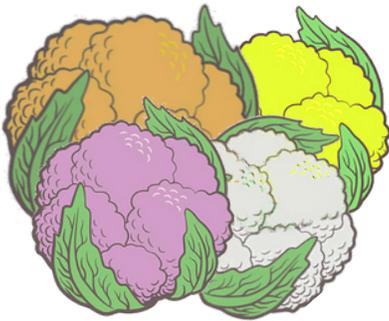
- The little florets of broccoli are buds ready to bloom: when left unharvested, broccoli will burst into a bunch of yellow flowers.
- Broccoli grows best in temperatures between 64 to 73 degrees fahrenheit.

- Most of the flavor of a cucumber comes from the seeds!
- Cucumbers help reduce stress! Just the smell of cucumbers can help people feel calmer.



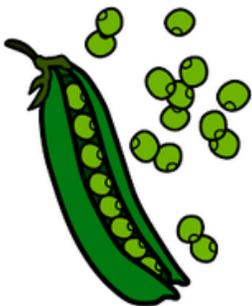
- It takes up to 36 apples to make one gallon of apple cider.
- The Rhode Island Greening apple is one of the oldest American varieties - it's been around since the 1650s!

- Collard greens are great for your immune system, and a strong immune system keeps you healthy!
- The collard plant has an upright stalk and can grow as tall as two feet tall.



- The most common type of cauliflower is white, but it can be also be green, purple, orange, brown and yellow
- The green variety of cauliflower is called broccoflower because it looks like broccoli.

- Cabbage is one of the oldest vegetables known - and still a favorite vegetable all over the world!
- Cabbage contains fiber and iron, which helps the digestive tract stay clean and healthy.



- Peas, like squash and peppers, are actually fruits! They grow from a flowering plant and contain seeds.
- Peas grow in pea pods on pretty vines up to 3 or 4 feet tall!

- There are dozens of lettuce varieties but they can be categorized into four main types: butterhead, crisp head, looseleaf and romaine.
- Darker green lettuce leaves are more nutritious than lighter green leaves.



- Corn is actually a grain, vegetable AND fruit, depending on when it is picked.
- Each kernel on a cob is actually one whole fruit!