



A Quarterly Newsletter from the NJ Department of Agriculture

BEST OF FARM TO SCHOOL AWARD 2023 - 2024

“Dogwood Hill Elementary”

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture presented Dogwood Hill Elementary School with the “Best in New Jersey Farm to School Award” during Jersey Fresh Farm to School week. The school celebrated the week with a Farm to School field day including watermelon races, local food tastings, and garden activities.



Dogwood Hill Elementary stands-out as the Best in NJ Farm to School, offering agricultural learning opportunities for the entire school, through the classroom, cafeteria and community. The cafeteria features a Harvest of the Month program that incorporates local produce into its menus, highlighted through recipes and promotions. To celebrate Farm to School Week, a farm stand showcasing locally grown produce was set up in the cafeteria. Students enjoy activities like “build your own salad” days, learning about tower gardens in class, and field trips to explore composting and planting. Dogwood Hill started their Farm to School initiative with a tower garden donated by the school’s PTO. The collaboration of Kelly Bosgra, student council advisor, student council, and Pomptonian Food Service has grown the Farm to School program creating a wonderful learning opportunity for the entire school community. Well done Dogwood Hill Elementary!





Cream of the Crop Award 2023 - 2024



“Ethel Jacobsen Elementary”



The New Jersey Department of Agriculture presented Ethel Jacobsen Elementary School with the Cream of the Crop Award during a visit to the school's classrooms, garden, and cafeteria.

Ethel Jacobsen kicked off the day with a visit to the schoolyard garden, pioneered by Bianca Aniski and supported by the entire school for 15 years. Activities included garden taste tests, planting seedlings, harvesting produce, and creating dioramas based on garden literature. The school participates in Jersey Tastes, allowing students to sample various offerings. For the tasting, students enjoyed fresh salsa made from garden ingredients. In addition to these hands-on experiences, Ethel Jacobsen integrates math and agricultural literacy by having students read age-appropriate books about plants and maintain journals to document their observations. Farm to School lessons also enhance science, english, music, art, physical education, health, and cooking sessions. Congratulations to Ethel Jacobsen Elementary!



JERSEY FRESH FARM TO SCHOOL FARMER RECOGNITION AWARD “Fernbrook Farms”



New Jersey Department of Agriculture Assistant Secretary Joe Atchison III recognized Fernbrook Farms in Burlington County as the winner of the Jersey Fresh Farm to School Farmer Recognition Award. The presentation took place during the celebration of the 14th annual Jersey Fresh Farm to School Week, September 23-27, 2024.

The program is an opportunity for farmers to highlight their Farm to School efforts and feature Jersey Fresh produce in local school meals.

“Fernbrook Farms has long been involved in the mission of educating students about the importance of agriculture and demonstrating many of the essential functions that make farms operational,” NJDA Secretary Ed Wengryn said. “Their commitment to agricultural education is exceptional and makes the farm a very deserving winner of this honor.” The farm’s Environmental Education Center engages several thousand children each year as they experience nature and learn about the sources of their food. The Center’s mission is to provide hands-on educational experiences for all young people by exploring the complex interconnectedness of the natural world. The Center’s programs include summer camps, homeschool classes, and afterschool events. Fernbrook Farms also features Community Supported Agriculture where more than 500 families receive a weekly share of fresh organic vegetables. To learn more: [Fernbrook Farms](#)



TOP TOMATO WINTER 2024

SHINING A SPOTLIGHT ON THOSE MAKING
A DIFFERENCE IN FARM TO SCHOOL

Maria Rivera

Maria Rivera may not don a cape in her daily work, but she embodies the spirit of a true "School Lunch Hero." Maria is a shining example of dedication and creativity in promoting healthy, fresh meals for our students. Maria has consistently gone above and beyond, finding innovative ways to incorporate seasonal vegetables into meals, ensuring that every student gets a taste of what's fresh from the garden.



Each day, Maria checks what's available from local farms, organizing taste tests and celebrating the bounty of Jersey Fresh produce. Her enthusiasm is infectious—she stops to thank students for their support of farm-to-table initiatives, reminding everyone of the importance of local agriculture.

Maria's love for cooking with garden ingredients not only nourishes our students but also instills a lasting appreciation for healthy eating. Join us in celebrating Maria Rivera, our culinary champion and a true advocate for Farm to School connections!



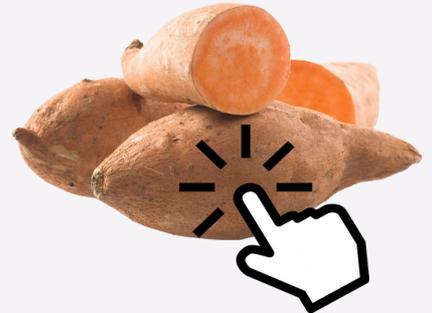
Students at Ethel Jacobsen Elementary give Ms. Maria's Jersey Fresh Garden Salsa a thumbs up!

Jersey Tastes! Monthly Activity Center

December

January

February



Farm to School Grants

Implementation



The Patrick Leahy Farm to School Grant Program is designed to increase the availability of local foods in schools and connect students to the sources of their food through education, taste tests, school gardens, field trips, and local food sourcing for school meals.

Turnkey



There are three Turnkey Grant project tracks available in FY 2025: Action Planning, Agricultural Education, and Edible Gardens. The project types are summarized as follows:

- Action Planning grantees will develop a roadmap for launching or enhancing farm to school activities.
- Agricultural Education grantees will incorporate agricultural education into curricula.
- Edible Gardens grantees will implement a food production operation.



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