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Mini grants help area farmers supply schools with local food

ANCA awards Farm to School grants to three St. Lawrence County farms

St. Lawrence County, NY - Getting local food into school cafeterias is becoming easier for three area farmers. The Adirondack North Country Association (ANCA) recently announced the recipients of its 2017 Farmer/Producer Mini Grant program, which provides funding to farmers and local food businesses whose projects streamline the farm to school supply chain.

Birdsfoot Farm and Fullers Farm, both of Canton, and Martin's Farmstand of Potsdam are receiving awards as part of the new grant program that provides funding for small farm to school projects. All three grant recipients have experience providing farm products to St. Lawrence County schools, often through the North Country Grown Cooperative.

"Beyond cost, schools face many obstacles getting local farm products into their cafeterias because of challenges with infrastructure, storage and distribution," said ANCA's Local Economies and Agriculture Director Josh Bakelaar. "Local producers need to follow strict food safety standards and adapt their products to the needs of schools. These mini grants help small growers and food entrepreneurs develop the capacity to serve our local institutions, safely bridging gaps in the supply chain and increasing student access to locally grown food."

Since 2016, Daniel Martin of Martin's Farmstand has been supplying St. Lawrence County schools with fruits and vegetables including beets, cantaloupe, carrots, celery, chard, green beans, lettuce, scallions, sliced peppers, sliced onions and tomatoes. Martin plans to use the grant funding to purchase equipment for slicing, processing and storing farm produce. He concedes that schools are often not prepared to handle raw products from the farm. Providing minimally processed products would increase sales, he said, and ultimately increase student consumption of local produce.

"With the proper processing and storage equipment, we'll have the capacity to give schools what they need when they need it," said Martin. "By having these tools available in our own facility, we'll be able to provide sliced vegetables efficiently and freeze and store certain products for when they are no longer in season."

Birdsfoot Farm and Fullers Farm will use their awards to purchase specialty equipment for washing salad greens and other vegetables. Fresh, locally produced salad ingredients are growing in popularity at many participating schools, and these growers recognize that providing ready-to-serve produce makes their product more appealing and easier to use for school staff.

The mini grant program is part of the larger “Drive for 25” Farm to School initiative which has been spearheaded by Assemblywoman Addie Jenne (D-Theresa) in an effort to increase local food options in Jefferson and St. Lawrence County schools. The initiative provides increased state funding of up to 25 cents more per meal for schools to expanded usage of local food products.

“As we have been working the kinks out of the farm to school process, it is clear that sometimes it is more cost effective to have farmers do some of the food prep so our schools can get the local food in and onto cafeteria trays as quickly as possible,” said Jenne. “These mini grants help the farmers and the schools, as there are all sorts of rules and regulations that have to be followed when feeding children in school. It’s great to see how well our school meal directors and farmers are working together to make farm to school a reality in the North Country.”

Drive for 25 has received a total of \$600,000 in state funding over the last two years. During the 2016-17 school year, the program included 16 participating school districts, 15 local farms selling directly to schools, over 12,000 students consuming local food in school and over 99,000 pounds of 47 different local food products offered at breakfast and lunch. Efforts like the mini grant program are intended to increase local food sales by expanding the diversity of local food products available, improving food safety practices and making local food procurement more efficient for school personnel.

“We’re building on the local food system,” said Bakelaar. “These big changes take time. We’ve gained a lot of momentum over the last year, and these farmer grants will push us farther along. With the help of this funding we’re seeing kids eating healthier food at school, expanding markets for local farmers, strengthening communities and enhancing local economies.”

[ANCA](#) is an independent nonprofit organization growing the New Economy in northern New York. Using an integrated approach to sustainable economic development and prosperity where economic health, community vitality and ecological stewardship are equally important outcomes, ANCA focuses on creating opportunity for people with diverse backgrounds, experience and education levels.

[Assemblywoman Addie Jenne](#) represents the 116th Assembly District, the so-called River District stretching from the shores of Lake Ontario in Jefferson County to the banks of the St. Lawrence River in the town of Massena in St. Lawrence County and includes the cities of Watertown and Ogdensburg and the towns of Canton and Potsdam. She serves on the state Assembly's Agriculture Committee and is chair of the state Assembly's Task Force on Food, Farm & Nutrition Policy.

Three (3) photos courtesy of Birdsfoot Farm:

Photo 1: Kerstin “Dulli” Tengeler, farmer and partner at Birdsfoot Farm

Photo 2: Cherry tomatoes grown on Birdsfoot Farm and prepared for market

Photo 3: Birdsfoot Farm employee Emma Duffany sells fresh produce at the Canton Farmers Market last October.

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