

Letter from Dorothy - Spring 2009

Hello Everyone!

Spring has arrived to Rhode Island! Sunlight is lasting a bit longer each day, trees and flowers are budding, and like all fresh vegetable lovers around the state, I am eagerly anticipating the first meal I'll be able to prepare using veggies from my own backyard and from the farmers in my town. I just signed up for my CSA share that will provide me with many varieties of veggies and fruits from June all the way to Thanksgiving.

Our cool spring weather is perfect for growing lettuce, and I encourage all of you who haven't planted lettuce or greens before to try it. Spinach, romaine, loose leaf, butter heads, chard, collards, kale - there are so many varieties, colors and tastes that even a beginning gardener can enjoy a full season of delicious and nutritious homegrown greens. Besides the satisfaction that comes from picking and eating your own fresh produce, starting a vegetable garden during this tough economic year can be an effective way to help stretch a strained household budget. For more information on planting, harvesting and eating lettuce & other greens, see our "Lettuce Begin" newsletter, part of the Kids First and Children's Garden Network partnership this spring.

Mindful that many RI families are trying to eat healthy while watching their bank balances, we have introduced a new workshop this year for schools and their families called "Eating Healthy on a Budget". Like all of our educational presentations, "Eating Healthy on a Budget" combines a discussion of ingredients and basic nutrition with a hands-on, interactive cooking demonstration and tasting, featuring RI grown foods whenever possible. Please contact us if your school community would like to schedule any of our Kids First Workshops for teachers, staff, parents or students.

The arrival of spring also means the beginning of a new season for Farm to School. Last year, we had nearly every school district in the state purchase a RI farm grown product to serve in their cafeterias! That's great news for our farms, for our school meals and for the health of our RI school kids! We want to ensure another successful RI growing season this year. We hope to kick off the 2009 Harvest by doubling the number of schools that purchase and serve RI grown lettuce and greens to their students this Spring! Our Kids First Farm to School Specialists, Kimberly Sporkmann and Leah Sarris, are ready to assist your district with purchasing RI grown foods and educating about the nutritional importance of eating those foods. Please contact us about increasing your school district's participation in the Rhode Island Farm to School Project.

Finally, I want to take the time to thank every individual who is trying to make a difference in the health of our RI schoolchildren. Everyday I hear from Kids First staff members about people who are taking extra steps to address our national childhood obesity problem on a local level. I hear about Walking Clubs and After School Fitness programs, I hear about staff members who are coming up with innovative ways to get students to eat more fruits, vegetables, legumes and whole grains at school lunch and I

hear about students who are taking the lead and encouraging their peers to improve their health and wellness. These are the stories that inspire me and encourage all of us at Kids First. As a way to inspire you, and as a special way to thank some of our most active Wellness Advocates, we'll be featuring their stories on our web site. If you know someone in your district who is advocating for student health in a unique way, I hope you will contact us so we can share their story as well.

I invite everyone to join me in welcoming the return of warmer days - let's sow some seeds and get outside for some active playtime!

Dorothy Brayley

Executive Director