

Letter From Dorothy - Summer 2011  
Plates of Real Food

**Hello Everyone,**



In late Spring, the USDA unveiled “My Plate”, the new circular symbol that will be used to help teach dietary guidelines. Replacing the “My Pyramid”, “My Plate” is divided into several colorful sections, each representing food groups. While the jury may still be out on the transition from one government symbol to another to help better health outcomes for all Americans, the best feature of “My Plate” is that it very clearly and very simply shows that at least half of our plates, at every meal, should consist of fruits and vegetables. This is an excellent way to teach kids that fresh and real plant-based foods, like fruits and vegetables, should make up the bulk of their meals.

In most school cafeterias in Rhode Island – those diligently and successfully implementing RINR (RI Nutrition Requirements) - kids do get the chance to load up on fruits and veggies during their lunch time.

*According to RINR, ALL RI students should have the opportunity to take up to three servings of different fruits and vegetables at every lunch (up to two fruits/vegetables at every school breakfast).* Thanks to the efforts of community members working with their school meal providers, healthier options are definitely appearing on more menus (although still not every day...) and we are seeing a bit more scratch cooking in an effort to serve less processed foods to our children.



As we move into the 2011 harvest season, I encourage parents and school administrators to further demand more scratch cooking and more fresh RI-grown foods being offered to students on school meal plates and in school salad bars. Our Kids First chefs recently finished a training session for Providence school cafeteria staff in which 5 different recipes were prepared, all featuring lots of fruits and veggies, many found locally. The recipes for these dishes can be found on our website and photos of the finished product can be seen on our Facebook page. Send us photos of healthier school meals in RI and we'll post them on our pages for others to see as well! Recipes like these make it easy for school foodservice staff to fill half a plate with fresh, tasty real foods that kids will enjoy!

In addition to teaching our kids how to fill their plates with fresh tasty fruits and vegetables – lots of them - I am pleased to say that I am hearing



more and more about school districts and afterschool programs that are teaching students how to garden and cook as a way to encourage better nutrition. Kids who spend time in the garden and then in the kitchen learning the basics of meal preparation will not only be gaining life skills, they will also absorb a good amount of nutrition education as well. In some districts, local chefs have volunteered to help teach cooking to kids - some as part of the Chefs Move to Schools program - and others have

joined their local Health & Wellness Committee as a way to help make positive changes in school meals. Getting kids to plant, cook and/or taste new foods is one of the best ways to make healthy eating fun.

If you are a chef, a food enthusiast, a food writer, a gardener, a farmer or a parent who wants to motivate healthier eating for RI children through better school food, please get involved! Schools need your help and your passion for growing, preparing and eating real food! Contact your local Health & Wellness Committee to get involved - our Kids First Health & Wellness Committee facilitators - Karin Wetherill and Carole Toselli - can help point you in the right direction in your community.

All of us at Kids First/Real Food First wish you a healthy, safe, fun and fruit and veggie filled summer season! (Right now, RI strawberries and spinach are overflowing on my plate! Soon it will be so much more!)



**Eat Healthy, Be Healthy!**

*Dorothy Brayley*

Executive Director, Kids First