

The Friend to the Farmer Award, Barbara Cohen, District Manager, Chartwells School Dining

Farm to School programs in the East Bay have been consistently offering a wide variety of RI Grown produce to students for over three years now. This is a result of one person's vision for seeing all the benefits of locally grown in school lunch and not taking no for an answer.



Barbara Cohen spearheaded a campaign to convince Chartwells Corporate that working with local farms was the “way to go” back when the idea was relatively new and untested on a broad scale. She met with much resistance, having to convince a large corporation that food from small, unknown farms was indeed safe. Barbara's persistence, along with her RI Farmers Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification, worked to see change happen at a great level.

Barbara Cohen worked hard to establish relationships with RI Growers who achieved the Good Agricultural Practices Certification, proving their food met high food safety standards. Barbara remains loyal to those farmers, purchasing on a consistent basis and following through with her distributor to ensure they maintain a strong relationship with her growers. Chartwells School Dining piloted their Farm to School project in Rhode Island with a sprinkling of RI Grown apples and potatoes starting in 2007. Over the past three years, the amount and variety of RI Grown offerings has steadily increased so that RI Grown is now a staple in their program.

The success of this program has spread far and wide to all Compass Group sectors across the country. Based on the groundwork laid here in RI, Compass Group challenged 78 distributors across the country to find farmers willing to prove they met tough food safety standards such as those dictated by RI's GAP certification. They did! Once the sources were identified, local food became available to school kids in all Chartwells School Dining schools. As these fresh fruits and veggies became the star of menus in so many schools, a large event was planned to celebrate.

Chartwells “Locally Grown Week” has been in the works for six months now. Pre-orders were placed with farmers last March for this fall initiative. As the event gained momentum, all Compass Group divisions started signing on. This initiative has huge positive economic impacts on all small farms involved. Last month alone, Compass group served \$1.7 million in local produce, and the Locally Grown Week is projected to multiply that number by 5 or 6 times. This all goes to show that 1 person can make a difference, a very big difference!

For her determination and perseverance for serving safe, fresh and delicious produce from RI farmers and the enormous impact her persistence is having on the Farm to School program nation-wide, we are proud to present Barbara Cohen with “The Friend to the Farmer Award”