

## The Tractor Trailblazer Award

*Presented to: Michael Marrocco, Director of Food Service, Cranston Public Schools*



The RI Farm to School program has deep roots in the Cranston School district. Food Service Director, Mike Marrocco, began partnering with Hill Orchards in 2002 to offer fresh RI Grown apples in school lunch. At the time, some RI apple growers were starting to cut down trees because the market for their apples was shrinking. Mike created a win-win situation by taking advantage of the available and affordable fruit (especially smaller more bite sized apples for children) growing quite literally in Cranston's backyard.

Proving that the purchase of locally grown produce is a true community building activity, Mike partnered with farmer, Vinny Confreda, who donated corn on the cob to Cranston schools. The corn needed shucking, so parents, teachers, administrators and students came together to make it happen. The first Cranston Community Corn Shucking took place 5 years ago and the annual event occurs every fall season. The only difference is that now Vinny Confreda plants the corn on the front yard of the Orchard Farms Elementary School. When the kids come back from summer break they get to see the corn growing and anticipate the delicious vegetable that will appear on their lunch trays.

Over the years Mike has added many more RI Grown products to the lunch menu, including tomatoes, potatoes, peaches, butternut and broccoli. In September 2009 the kids at Edgewood Highlands and Arlington schools had the pleasure of eating RI Grown Green beans that they pick and prepare themselves. As part of a grant-funded Pawtuxet Village Farmers Market / Farm to School Program designed by School Committee member, Steve Stycos Cranston middle school kids learned about the importance of supporting local farmers, as well as why it's so important to eat their veggies, especially green beans. The program included a tasting of 3 different preparations of green beans with Mike Marrocco in the cafeteria. The kids voted on their favorite, then went to the farm to pick the product necessary to prepare the dish. One lucky class worked in the kitchen with Mike to prepare the dish for the rest of the students at the school.

Mike's enthusiasm for serving local produce extends his program far beyond the walls of the cafeteria, building community and the local economy. His willingness to try so many different RI Grown products has paved the way for other RI school districts to do the same. **For his consistent and contagious enthusiasm for all things RI Grown over the past eight years, we are proud to present Michael Marrocco with the Tractor Trailblazer Award.**