

USDA Community Food Project Annual Report
The SOL (Seeds of Leadership) Patrol: Cultivating Healthy Communities

Seeds of Solidarity Education Center, Inc.
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December 1, 2006

I submit this report as testament to the depth of the impact the Community Food Project carried out by Seeds of Solidarity Education Center and partners had on the North Quabbin region of Massachusetts. As a final evaluation, I chose to interview representatives from the region who had participated directly in the work of the project goals and objectives. The portraits that follow illuminate the challenges and rewards of cultivating healthy communities. Through these interview results, one can clearly see how the lives of students, teachers, administrators, collaborating community organizations, local farmers, and food service directors were touched by the Seeds of Leadership Patrol: Cultivating Healthy Communities project.

This portion of the final report demonstrates the broad and deep changes experienced in this community as a result of this project. In nine individual interviews, the full extent of the project success is revealed. The SOL project exceeded its goals with regard to the human factor... people learned how to support each other in a grassroots struggle to secure fresh and healthy meals for low-income children and families. SOL created a model for sustaining a self-reliant system of local food sources by forging the necessary networks and relationships that make this future possible. Every interview resonates the project's success in transforming the conceptual and practical frameworks necessary to empower change in the way people think about food and where it comes from, securing the health of children and establishing the resilience of a community.

It is clear that the founders of Seeds of Solidarity, Deb Habib and Ricky Baruch are extraordinarily competent and effective people. This project is a powerful model that can be used in other regions as a result of their hard work and dedication. They are convinced that community food self reliance is possible and helps create strong community. The Seeds of Solidarity site, which is referred to many times, demonstrates food self-reliance, provides practical strategies for using renewable energy and models community service. The organizations, founders, and staff clearly practice what they 'preach'. This role modeling is a key factor in the success of this project because people believed their ideas could work. In each interview, the belief in community, authentic practice and demonstrated expertise of Seeds of Solidarity were raised as critical factors in the success of this project.

The objectives raised in the final report are incorporated into each interview. I have 'bolded' the pertinent phrases that directly address specific objectives as laid out in the project grant. The objectives are noted below in order to highlight their presence within the text of the interviews that follow.

Objective 1: Engage low-income teenagers and college interns in leadership and food system activism as they learn to cultivate food and help to implement school-based gardens.

Objective 2: Create a regional network of 'local hero schools' to participate in farm to school buying and partner with existing 'local hero farmers' who serve as mentors.

Objective 3: Implement the SOL Patrol's Local Food, Local Energy curriculum tool kit in schools.

Objective 4: Promote the importance of locally produced food and renewable energy towards achieving community food security.

Each of the interviews is represented below in an edited form. Themes emerged among these interviews that directly address the objectives. The most profound finding is the reference to the SOL Patrol: Cultivating Healthy Communities project successfully building networks that create community strength and enable change in food systems. The way in which this project cultivated connections among disparate people in order to create a healthier food system is present in each interview. Everyone seemed to gain knowledge about local food systems, discover alternatives to fossil fuels and the costs of production/distribution, and learned to grow their own food insuring the self-reliance of their community.

Eighth Grade Students at Athol Royalston Middle School

I interviewed four students. This is their combined response two general questions: What did you learn from this curriculum? Tell me about your involvement in growing food?

We planted three different types of greens in the greenhouse and other kinds of plants in the outside gardens. There is one bed each of spinach and spicy greens and salad greens indoors. Each class planted one row. We had to rake and water and do the compost. Each class maintained a different hump of ground and plantings. We came out to do the care and maintenance in our science classes. Some of us peeked in on our ways home from school. **We harvested the greens and took them to the cafeteria and served it to the 6th and 7th graders so they could see what to expect next year. We also have eaten the greens in class with local carrots and apples mixed in.**

I couldn't eat salad greens everyday - my system would rebel. I'm just not used to eating this way on a regular basis. But, these are very good.

When we eat lunch now in the cafeteria it is a lot healthier than it used to be. We have less grease...no onion rings...less fried food and more salad at lunch. They don't give us junk food...like pop tarts...or chips...we get things with less fats, less sugar and less salt.

I feel a lot better now after lunch, not so tired and sluggish.

It shows us that every day we can't just eat junk food. My snacks at home have even changed. I've been telling my Mom about the things I get at school and she has changed her shopping to make sure **I get more fresh food for snacks and dinner. I eat more apples and baby carrots. I have a lot more energy.**

It's opened my eyes to the kind of food they typically sell in supermarkets and how to be more careful when buying food. And that I can grow lots of the food at home for at least half of the year instead of getting it at the store.

The program showed me how to be self reliant with my food. We learned that most grocery stores only have about three days worth of fresh foods...if it were cut off, we wouldn't be able to get it from the supermarket and now we know that we can grow it.

We also want to change the amount of travel that food goes through to get here. The greenhouse has shown us that **we can grow food longer** into the year than we thought.

If you eat healthier food it will become a habit... a habit that you keep forever. It just feels a lot better to eat better and its not really that much more expensive. You need less food to keep you satisfied...junk food just makes you hungrier because you are not really feeding yourself just filling up space with empty calories. Its healthier for us...if you play sports you have a longer energy gain.

We had to work together to get the greenhouse planted. It's a good experience to work as a group to grow food and do it together. **We learned how to be a community and feed ourselves.**

We played games where we had to see how far certain food traveled to get to the supermarket. The teacher would put foods out on the playing fields representing the same distance as they would have to travel to get here...we had to run the distance comparatively. **It helped us understand how much energy is used just to get food here to MA...the same kinds of food that actually grow here.** What the heck, we don't have to use that much fuel to get good food, its right here already.

We had to negotiate and maneuver through trucks, fossil fuels, pesticides etc. to get certain foods and someone led us through the maze that exists to get certain foods. We had to avoid pesticides, chemicals, time, fuels and other things to get to the food of our choice. **It taught us to understand labels and to look harder at where food comes from.**

This has **changed my mind about food.** I get excited about growing food and eating better. And its cool to find out more about where it comes from and how much we can do to change things...make food more healthy and less harmful to the environment.

Chris Collins

Principal...Athol Royalston Middle School

My role in this project was to help connect Seeds of Solidarity with people in the school who could get passionate about it. There are a lot of initiatives brought into schools...and if the principal is not behind it they won't succeed! I love this one.

I have spent an enormous amount of time, at least a thousand hours in school cafeterias, five or six hours a week over 12 years. **I see what kids do and don't eat. I see how those habits impact them physically and as learners. SOL is a worthwhile initiative because it targets getting healthy foods into kid's bodies.** Getting local foods into schools is almost secondary for me.

Through the wellness movement...the food service directors have to meet federal requirements for fat and calories and nutrition. **I don't know that any changes would have been made in school cafeterias if this initiative hadn't come along.** The wellness approach made it a priority to make food served to kids healthier. It is a federal initiative...you can lose federal funding if you don't meet the criteria. The wellness committees were charged with coming up with a plan to change the way foods are served...paying attention to fats, food calories, sugars, etc.. **The Local Heroes network, the workshops led by Deb Habib, the connections made with local growers and other resources really made the wellness thing happen.**

Every school had to have a plan in place by the beginning of this year for everything from school lunches to snacks and drinks. That connected with what Deb and Ricky were doing. The onus is on us as adults to help children make good decisions about food. Once they learn that healthy stuff tastes good too, we can change eating habits. We have to put more reasonable things in front of them. Most of the junk available to kids through vending machines and school stores driven by money...if my charge as a cafeteria person is to break even and I have to fund my own staff and buy my own supplies, I'll put out what sells in the machines order to fund my business. It is an unfortunate part of the school lunch program that it has to fund itself.

Only the health conscious food service directors, who have the drive to investigate and arrange their buying to bring good food in despite its cost, will comply. Vending machines kick back money to schools, so people will fill them with what sells. They have a captive audience filled with students who don't know junk from healthy food and who feel like they have no say in the product that is sold.

I would love to find money to bring Deb and Ricky to my new school. In the other school, even more than whether kids were eating well or not, we saw an opportunity to connect hands on stuff like building a greenhouse and planting fresh foods as a rich lesson. **Athol is a really poor community Growing healthy food for the community at large seemed a great idea...and it made a great difference. SOL was a great learning and community service project.** The community became much stronger partners with the school through the delivery and pick up of food...not just

parents but the broader community started coming to the school for food out of the greenhouse.

I first got connected with them as a service-learning project. Seeds of Solidarity built a greenhouse for the school and connected us with fresh food providers. That's why I had to find teachers who were passionate about it – people who knew the potential of gardening as a curriculum idea. The team of teachers really bought into it and made it happen. They started growing seedlings in the winter, all of the plants were on the windowsills. The kids had daily reminders of the planting to come later in the year...the students were intimately involved in the process of growing.

I was able to form a strong friendship with Deb and Ricky. **My relationship with their program shifted my mind and perceptions about what is important.** I came to this new school and saw that they had a greenhouse that was in disrepair. I'm trying to find money to activate this greenhouse. I would have ignored it without the previous experience. I organized a group of teachers to take care of it and they have planted flowers and plants that are flourishing. It makes a significant difference simply to have living plants inside a school that students are caring for. The community food aspect will come later as we grow enough to get veggies back out into the community.

The food from the Athol greenhouse did not serve the cafeteria full time. It needed time to establish itself. **I'd say that the most important learning comes from hands-on aspect and diversity of experiences that are made available to teachers and students through gardening.** Getting outside and working...getting ones hands in the dirt...finding out what compost is...watching a seedling turn into something edible. These are valuable and important learning.

The carbon emissions and alternative fuel aspects of this program are supported by the new governor of MA. Seeds of Solidarity run biodiesel vehicles and brought them to school. The kids were exposed to fuel alternatives in real time...watching the vehicles run was compelling and educational as they learned where the fuel came from and why this was a chosen source. After experiencing the vehicles, they could better understand that aspect of the full cost of fuel.

Seth: Antioch University New England Teacher Certification Intern

I had a three-pronged internship with Seeds of Solidarity. I worked as staff for the Garlic and Arts Festival with volunteers and SOL Garden apprentices. I worked with Ricky on the farm to get experience sowing seeds, laying down beds, composting and learning the insides of farming practice and philosophy. I worked with three classes in the Athol-Royalston Middle School and **delivered an eight-week curriculum focused on the greenhouse and growing local food.** I aligned the food curriculum with the MA standards and academic guidelines in order to make this permanent and easy to integrate. The teachers fully embraced this curriculum.

In the first week, the **students made garden beds in the greenhouse and around the outside of the greenhouse**. We planted seeds, watered, laid out compost and organized the plantings. There were 80 students in three chunks who came out with their science block teacher. The teachers were involved so they could follow the hands-on lessons with journal entries as part of English classes.

The second week, we planted more seeds and watered. We laid a winter oats bed with compost and seeds.

The third week, I implemented the classroom curriculum. We **talked about nutrition** and the food pyramid. **The students looked at their school menu and thought about how to plug in MA grown produce**. It was done without judgment about the current food offerings. We talked about what is local food and what accounts for food that comes from larger more corporate food systems. We talked about what kinds of food can be successfully grown in Massachusetts, how to extend the growing season with greenhouses and uncovered the misconceptions about local foods and the limitations or possibilities for self-reliant food production.

The fourth week we did the story of a potato. I brought in a lesson plan that was developed by the Youth Horticulture Program in Mass....which looks at the life of a conventional French-fry and how the Idaho potato goes to CA to a processing plant then goes to Hannaford's in Maine, then is shipped to a local store where you drive to pick it up from a freezer and take it home to pop in the oven. The other potato was grown by local growers in MA. You drive to a local farmer's market, take the potato home and cut it up and cook it. We **talked about the full cost of food** like including fossil fuels used in transportation, pesticides, chemical preservatives and food enhancers, freezer energy – studying the energy input and they really got it!

The fifth week we **planted garlic** to show how one has to prepare ahead to get food for the next year...and to get them outside into the greenhouse again.

The sixth week we got into a discussion of what is safe food. We did a few exercises on **being a critical consumer** and finding ways to be empowered to choose alternatives that were more local and less costly to the environment. Mostly we learned to read and be critical of food labels, looking at chemical additives, distance to destination, etc.

The seventh week we **learned to navigate through all the food choices available at the local stores**. One of the former interns created an exercise where one student is blindfolded and is led through a maze of choices by the 'wise and informed' consumer. This exercise seemed to have a big effect on the students.

The eighth week the students evaluated their progress by **creating the biography of a food they like**. Each student developed a chart that identified the ingredients, origin, the cost of production and transportation uncovering the full cost of the product and an analysis of how healthy the food was. This was compared to a local fresh alternative.

I incorporated an integrated food curriculum into a traditional system. The students were involved in growing their own food, which made a big difference to their interest. **The greenhouse activities got them working the soil, planting seeds, watching the plants grow, harvesting and eating their results.** They could taste the difference in the fresh foods. They saw that you could grow food in their climate and extend the season with a greenhouse. The students saw the excitement on the food service director's face when they delivered fresh greens to the cafeteria and made a salad for their peers.

Athol is an economically depressed area. **Deb has learned the politics of change in this region's schools.** They are proud and needy. Relationships and respect are important to maintain and cultivate. We didn't want to criticize the current food service. Deb knows that everyone is doing their best and shouldn't be vilified. She starts with the situation at hand and gently offers alternatives that align well with the economic situation and the belief that each food service director is providing the best possible nutrition they know how to serve to the children in each school. It is a learning process that demands patience and compassion. Not everyone knows the benefits or possibilities of serving fresh food. But, when kids bring a gift to the cafeteria in a celebratory parade...it is received well and graciously.

Relationships are critical to the long-term sustainability of a project. How it is introduced into a school is paramount to its acceptance. This project gets to the basics and plucks the heartstrings of anyone who knows how these kids live in the day-to-day reality of the dominant economic situation. **The kids and parents need to understand that they can grow food...that local food is fresh and healthy and affordable...that they can be self reliant...that someone cares about their health.**

Marlene

Food Service Director of seven schools in Athol-Royalston District

I have started ordering local foods, like apples, for the cafeteria as a result of this project...things that are available in this Northeast climate. A lot of the fresh foods won't be available soon, as winter approaches. **Serving local foods has been very positive.** I put signs up on the local apples and the kids find it interesting...and they are drawn to it. Many of the kids worked at the farm where the apples are grown and felt some pride in that. **I will continue to search for local foods but budgeting for it is a challenge because many of the things I can get cheaper through my vendor.** I have always stressed fresh fruits and veggies...there is a salad bar at the high school. At the high school, at least 120 students take advantage of the salad bar and they love it! It is a 'have it your way' salad and they can choose as much and whatever they like. I will try it next year at the elementary school. **Sherry Fiske, another food service director, says that the salad bar works really well in the elementary level...so I'll have to try it out.**

Sherry has been an inspiration for us. The network helped bring together folks who normally would not discuss how to make these things happen in schools. We normally just do our own thing....this project has brought us together to share ideas, learn how to shift things around so change is possible. Its not easy but it helps to know that others have had success and how they had success.

We do a lot of our own cooking here...particularly baking. We make all our own deserts and breads. **The government doesn't give us anything to support serving better food. They ask us to change but don't give us the tools to do it well.** This month on the commodities sheet, they offered brown rice for the first time. They also gave back raisins...for the first time in 20 years! I'd love to see them give us whole wheat flour and oatmeal, neither of which we've seen for years.

I've always run my food service in the black and been profitable. It has given me the opportunity to spend a little more on buying local foods and more whole foods. But, as a result of budget cuts elsewhere, they have asked me to pay 80% of my employees benefits...they are taking away any of the profits we were able to produce. In my mind, whatever I do is all for the kids...what ever I can offer is for their health and wellbeing. I won't bother to try to have a profit again. **I will put every last cent into the healthiest lunches I can provide for the kids...and buy more local foods now that I know where to get them.**

Well over 1/2 million dollars has been lost from school lunch funds over the last 3 years...they've been diverting the money I could spend on lunch to other costs. This next year it will be difficult to buy the things I know are necessary to serve a healthy lunch.

The network gatherings and workshops that were part of this project are great. We are able to meet the local growers who tell us what is available and to talk to area growers and figure out who would charge what for what...the apples I get from the area grower are cheaper than my vendor. In Athol, with 2000 students, according to my vendor, I purchase more fresh foods for use in school lunches than all the schools in Boston combined. City schools don't cook on site...they use processed foods. I have seven small schools with six operating kitchens fully staffed.

I use the NurtiKids to computerize the meals with the healthy food criteria. **We have an enhanced meal pattern that pushes the fruits, grains and vegetables,** but other schools may choose the less healthy approaches because they have different pressure on them to meet tighter budgets. When ketchup is considered a vegetable, you can save a lot of money choosing it over broccoli.

I serve more home-cooked meals than other schools. Chicken potpie and turkey dinners are a favorite. They can't get enough of them. But, the government stopped sending turkey as a commodity so there will be no more turkey dinners. They are moving away from sending raw meats like chicken and turkey for sanitary reasons but it changes the way you can serve food. We are starting to receive more things with a lot of preservatives. The lunches have changed with these changes.

The Seeds of Solidarity staff is so enthusiastic and willing to be helpful and offer ideas and network and offer suggestions that you feel compelled to participate in their work. There are no other people around who believe so strongly in this purpose and their enthusiasm rubs off. **This movement toward fresh and local food wouldn't have happened if they weren't there.** The director, Deb Habib has a big smile and really believes in the program and its goals and it shows. I only wish we were in school in the summer so we could all get outside growing gardens and picking and helping people realize where food comes from...

Al Rose, Farmer: Red Apple Farm

Seeds of Solidarity is an organization in the community that has added a tremendous amount **by pulling us all together under a common purpose, supporting community growers and finding markets for our products while providing healthier food to families and schools...**they are really driven people. They walk the talk...they are focused.

Their mind set is to make an impact on the community with regard to sustainability. They are role models and educators.

The Farm was invited to attend the Local Heroes networking meetings. We have provided food for all the meetings and have representatives there to talk to interested providers from the schools...Marlene, the food service director, contacted us through the network meetings. We started delivering 10 bushels of apples directly to the schools. They go to the high school and middle schools. The students call me the 'apple guy'. She wants the smallest apples and it created a new market for them. **A lot of the kids who work for me come from the high school. They identify with the apples that come in from the farm...they feel a great pride in the quality of the apples and volunteer to unload them when they come to the high school.** The kids are that much more connected to the food...the kids grade them and pick them and now they are eating them. The farm becomes a deep connection for generations of people. I never saw this when they asked us to do delivery but now I realize the depth of the impact.

We have had groups come out here from the schools as part of their curriculum to prune raspberries because they were going to plant them at their schools. They helped me and I taught them. A couple kids were saying, "My grandfather told me to pay attention because I'd have to do this when I came home." It has helped us create a relationship with an area and group of people that has not traditionally been a market for us at the farm.

My wife is really adamant about the wellness program...she says that we set the stage now for the future of children. **The meetings that were organized helped to educate the community about how to write the wellness policy and see it through with more fresh and local foods.** Coca cola is a sponsor in most of these schools. There hasn't

been an organizational effort to undo this trend. **This project has given people the organization and knowledge to give kids repetitive exposure to healthy foods...if they grow food and are more likely to taste it and like it.**

Kids get into habits of eating fast food and lots of sugar. They don't equate feeling bad with eating that stuff. **I think that this project has helped kids realize that what they eat influences how they feel.** But, if the awareness becomes you feel this way if you eat this way makes a difference. Things are changing. The fact that Marlene called me shows the difference. Marlene had to help me set the fair price because I don't do wholesale. So Marlene got the mindset to help me figure out how to do this fairly. The mindset of most school management is to simply figure out how it works in the books...Marlene showed me that schools can change when people realize the full impact on kids and their health.

Through the wellness approach and the community empowerment we are investing in the future...wellness of a country and a culture. You can't invest money any better than supporting these grassroots movements that really reflect the true American values of caring for others and doing our best to be great.

Athena Bradley: Solid Waste District Educator

I acted as an advisor on composting and waste reduction on the Seeds of Solidarity Community Food project. **In the workshops that were held as part of the local hero network and other farm to school workshops they organized, I handed out materials on worm composting and waste reduction.** We assist schools in setting up composting where feasible. And we help with recycling. We are the solid waste district for Franklin County.

Primarily, the Swift River School picked up worm composting in five classes. It was a big success for the students in all the grades. We bought worm composting bins. We adapted biology and other sciences to teach the worm composting. We provided a worm guide and taught students how to study the biology of worms. **It got students aware of composting and its role on farms and the importance of building up of soil on local farms. It made kids aware of the role of soil in this country.** It partnered with waste reduction lessons that we teach. Teachers adopted it thoroughly. I talk about the five things that animals need to live, it's the same with worms. It will continue into this year. It is often difficult to get into the schools but they all love the SOL program so much that it made it easier to get into classrooms as part of her program.

I attended the first wellness workshop run by the Local Heroes network. It introduced the wellness policy in a real easy way and showed how to get local farmers into the picture. Deb facilitated and showed how to condense a number of different concerns and possibilities together into one goal. And there were lots of representatives from different aspects of schools there together.

Seeds of Solidarity has made the possibility of fresher food and more local foods in schools look like a possibility for all. If the successes of the schools who have incorporated this approach become known then hopefully school food will become healthier. **All the food service directors offered salad bars and offered more fresh fruits and veggies in the menus. The gardens bring the process home and they learn about cooking and eating these fresh foods. The fact that they run their equipment on bio-diesel is another big eye-opener for local farmers. The organic, local, carbon emission pieces of this are very clear from them. Not just gardening but resource awareness.**

Annie Kleffner Antioch University New England Environmental Education Intern

I was involved in Seeds of Solidarity community education programs at **three different sites**: a local YMCA camp, the Athol Playground program and the Pinecrest Housing Summer Cooking and Nutrition Program. Casey and I went to the three sites and taught a series of cooking or nutrition lessons. The best model was with the YMCA...because we saw mostly the same kids so we could build continuity in the program. The kids were exposed to our lessons two times a week for six weeks. **We cooked meals with them from scratch, talked about the food pyramid and reading nutrition labels, tried to help them make healthier decisions about what they were eating.**

One of the most successful lessons focused on ethnic foods and culture and cooking examples with local foods. We read Nora Dooley's books which are wonderful introductions to culturally distinctive foods. Everybody bakes bread...Everybody serves soup... Everybody makes rice. She represents all the different ways that ethnic families make rice, bread and soup in these books. We would read the books and experiment with the different approaches to cooking that were represented. The coolest lesson was with the oldest group of kids. I went online and found different recipes from different cultures and we played guessing games. I listed the ingredients, described how something was cooked and what the food was called. They had to guess where the food was from. It was a risk but ended up a huge success. We tried to find local foods to use as ingredients. **The older kids liked thinking about the food pyramid. We compared food pyramids from other countries...and discussed why they might have different element of their meals altered because of geography and culture.**

Athol playground program is a half-day program where parents can drop off their kids. They serve breakfast and lunch and do activities in between. It is called a Summer feeding site...there are **teen counselors and most of the program involves being outside without a lot of structure. Having us coming in with food-based lessons seemed out of place. But, we made ice cream and smoothies. They love smoothies. We tied in the local foods aspect by bringing in strawberries and other things from around the area. By the end, all the kids would shout 'a local farm' when we asked them where a food was from. We gave all the kids a map and located the foods on the map of the Quabbin area...marking the origins of local foods used in cooking.**

They also started to recognize local foods in the grocery store and would tell us after shopping with their parents. .

The Pinecrest Housing 'feeding site' is managed through the schools by Sherry Fiske, the Food Service Director. It makes sure that low income children are guaranteed two meals a day when school is out for the summer. **We went three times and introduced local foods and showed how to cook them.** Anyone who needed to could come to eat, including parents. We tried to make it educational and entertaining as well. We made Pesto. They had never heard of it. They loved it. Supposedly it takes about seven times for a child to try and enjoy something new like fresh veggies but they loved the pesto right off. There were a couple parents who stayed. They hadn't ever had it before either. **The parents learned how to make it out of local ingredients.**

A lot of the things we exposed the kids to like fresh peas, fresh greens (not iceberg) and a variety of breads wholegrain were new. Most of them really loved the exposure to the new tastes. Doing it on a regular basis, kids are more willing to try new things.

The other big piece was the course for teachers that helped them develop curriculum around food that was held last spring. We had to think about the classroom in the delivery of food lessons and consider what they are required to teach, whether they feel comfortable doing new things, and if they had access to the venues needed for cooking etc. Some teachers went totally wild with it developing a month-long unit. One teacher did graphs of healthy snacks vs. unhealthy snacks. They did different little cooking projects and exposed kids to new foods. TIME is a big problem.

We helped teachers solve the lack of access to cooking facilities. Casey, another Seeds of Solidarity intern, developed **Cooking carts** at Fisher Hill, Dexter Park, and Butterfield schools. She made up cooking carts that can be taken into classrooms which had measuring cups, mixing and blending tools. Teachers could take finished product to the kitchen if it needed to be baked. This made cooking in the classroom a reality and easy, it could be used by teachers without having to schedule kitchens.

There is more general awareness of food in schools and changes are being made. **The farm to school connection is much stronger in the N. Quabbin area as a result of this program. Three years ago no one would have thought of connecting to local farms, but now they think of it first.** Even if its only apples, the teachers are looking for local. **Bringing the farmers together with the teachers, students, principals...the Local Heroes GATHERINGS are really important. The fact that Deb facilitated the snacks at gatherings from local farmers raised the awareness of what is in the community. Actually meeting folks made the connections happen. Bringing people together makes the big difference.**

People began to realize the impact of local foods on use of fossil fuels and that the taste is better. The wear and tear of produce from the extent of travel was easy to get kids to understand. During taste tests they would react dramatically to the traveled vs the

local fruits. Parents would feel the impact when shopping. **The older kids understood the political nature of local...taxes, community business, keeping the money in the community. Supporting the farmer that you know.**

Catherine Sands Fertile Ground: A community partner

I manage a small grass roots initiative called Fertile Ground. Deb asked me to be **part of the Local Heroes School network. Along with CISA, we developed a strong and engaged network of teachers, parents and community organizers interested in farm to school programming. We created a forum for them to voice what they needed, to get speakers, and to get training in nutrition, local food procurement, cooking fresh foods, etc.** The process of pulling together the three different organizations was amazing. **Deb did a great job in pulling together our and communities needs and did a series of workshops over two years.** It gave us a chance to acknowledge the drive to connect schools with local sources and get them together with resources and have access to educational programs without having to find separate funding. **We had 75-80 people including food service directors, parents, science and math teachers, principals, school board people, and school nurses come in the first year.**

School Wellness was one focus of organizational meetings put together by Seeds of Solidarity-- they seemed to stick with the development of a wellness process through to the end. It made people feel like they weren't alone and gave them possibilities and opportunities to pursue. It was important for teachers and nurses to see the parental interest in health and eating fresh foods in school.

It opened a forum that is still sitting there waiting to be used. There is an active mailing list. It provided a quick way to organize and run a workshop. But there isn't follow up money to continue the network activities. **It is critical to have a network. It makes a region stronger when it can share and leverage funding or resources together and to have a network that supports people trying to organize communities around this process.**

Hands on learning stays with people all of their lives. This approach to gardening and greenhouses and food as a focus in classrooms is essential to our future. **Learning to delight in fresh veggies and fruits...tasting new tastes is basic to our children's lives. I am reading about the positive effects of good food on learning, test scores, discipline.** It is the glue for interdisciplinary learning. Students can learn observation skills, math, social studies, language arts and regional history through the study of food.