



## NJ Farm to School Conference

April 18, 2009

Lawrenceville School

### Speaker Notes

#### Session 2: Connecting Farms to Cafeterias: Food Service Perspectives

#### **Gary Giberson, Sustainable Fare, Executive Chef and Owner Lawrenceville School (ggiberson@sustainablefare.com)**

Financial—It is not true that sustainability costs more. We have functioned below the Consumer Price Index CPI. Yes, we spend money on food but I don't waste money as do some public and independent schools.

Gary said he had personal epiphany when he began feeding children. He realized that Aldo Leopold, an influential American environmentalist, had graduated from Lawrenceville so he launched the Aldo Leopold initiative to help the school and the kids find their "sense of place" in the community and beyond.

"For myself, I drove my car to the parking lot everyday and parked in the same spot and did my job and never truly experienced the community around Lawrenceville at all," he said.

"Meeting Mikey Azzara was a perfect storm because it showed me that food service directors need to get out of their office and meet their farmers. It will change their life," Giberson added.

There are six steps to sustainable dining. For a food service to become sustainable they need to do the following:

1. **Manage waste** --- all types: time labor, resources.
  - \* He showed a photo of dumpsters overflowing with trash and said this was how they managed waste before he started his program. Then, the environmental club spread plastic bottles from a weekend's recycling on the steps and area outside the library and students had to shuffle through them to get where they wanted to go. This made the statement that there is: **no such thing as away.**
2. **Involve the management team** Mr, Giberson found that his management team wanted to be part of the recycling program and wanted to be asked their opinions about how to save time and money. They looked at procurement and what food was packaged in/they invested in food waste composters. One broke down the cafeteria waste into liquid fertilizer but the EPA said it would have to be treated

- before added to the garden beds. Then they purchased an invessel digester with the end product of mulch. In the beginning they captured cooking oil to reuse--- now they have developed a food for oil program---they trade their used cooking oil for bread
3. **Ask Questions** Was the food purchased fresh? How far has it been transported? Is it processed? Does the food have good nutritional value? How is it packaged? Does it taste good?
  4. **Research** origins of food purchases—they were so excited to get a specific type of frozen fish until they realized it had been shipped from China
  5. **Find local farms** and farmers who can meet your needs
  6. Work through existing vendors and ask where it comes from
- \* **Conserve resources and ask these questions--**
- are you curtailing your use of resources and equipment?
  - is the infrastructure sound?
  - Is your food service operating efficiently?
- \* Students now scrape their own plates into different bins so the kitchen staff can work on more pressing matters. And they have also gone trayless to cut down on water use.  
This can cut down on your water and energy bills.

### **Training**

Giberson had to teach his kitchen staff the trade of being cooks again—staff takes pride in this/cross duties/less people calling in sick---involved in food that they feel proud to serve not embarrassed to serve the food. The kitchen staff also works in the gardens.

**Awareness**---if kids and parents do not know what you are doing you are losing an opportunity. Parents need to know what you are doing-in the classroom and dining center They have dinner in the dark to conserve energy. They eat by candlelight. They also ran a Trash-on (fash-ion) Show

They also work to advertise grains offering a new awareness.

For instance, they bought nice crates to sell apples from...students were excited about the varieties and ice cream consumption went down fifty percent.

\*Seed to table very critical --- kids need to know where their food comes from and the garden should be transparent to the community

## **Cheryl Karcher, Maschio's Food Service Manager and Cook (gckarcher1@embarqmail.com)**

Grew up with a Farm stand by her school. She would take petty cash and buy anything she could that was fresh to work into her menu that day.

She said she feels compelled to offer fresh, local, healthy foods to the children.

Noticed that farm to school programs offer a vital link to sustainability and wants to create a kitchen garden coordinator position to bring awareness to the students of these links.

She helps out in the garden during the garden club at her school. She believes gardens are source of self discovery.

Said she sees the end result—the food she serves is colorful and nutritious. Now adult teachers eat in the lunchroom with the kids. Karcher believes it is crucial for adults and students to interact over a meal.

She also picks what is available and whatever she can use. When it is time to harvest they label everything and go out to the students and let them touch and feel the vegetables

Sampling—challenge is how to get students to choose the healthy options offer alongside what is offered —Her answer is to be non-confrontational. After trying a new vegetable few times, she says, they ask for it.

Masshios works with wellness policies and now sends trucks to pick up produce from the local farm where she used to buy with her petty cash.

Recommends a centralized person to coordinate with the garden/cook/cafeteria/teachers/students.

She also talked about being smart about what you cook and how to reuse it in another dish. For instance, turning extra pasta into a low mien dish. But she had to teach staff how to think ahead according to the menu. She encouraged staff to work on the project and get new skills. The cook in charge of the kitchen may be over whelmed with processing when the staff is not prepared to help. We don't need to purchase frozen vegetables in winter if there is already stock in place.

In Farm to School initiatives it is crucial to meet resistance and allow for a learning curve and offer opportunities for teachers to interact.

She offers fruit and vegetable of the month to keep it seasonal.

Recipe contest among kitchen staff members—get input and help them to be engaged and involved.

Equipment for composting kitchen scraps composted at her school

Garden is part of the kitchen. It is important that it be part of the curriculum and link with the cook and the kitchen...these can not be two separate worlds.

**Sal Valenza/Food Service Director, West New York, New Jersey (SValenza@wnyschools.net)**

Their goal is to encourage kids to eat healthier foods and work together with educators, “we all need to do it.” he says.

They worked with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation which was part of the Bill Clinton Foundation together with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and American Heart Association.

Used Vermont Feed website as a guideline...or NOFA-.  
Their motto:Community, Classroom, Cafeteria, Commitment.

He went to his administrators and said, “I want to hire a chef...he is going to go in the classrooms every single day and they are going to learn about it in the classroom and in the cafeteria

They took part in Walk across America to help kids lose weight and linked it to classroom learning.

“Instead of focusing on cookies we focused on culture”

Goals:

Encourage healthy eating habits that will stay with our students for their lifetime  
To use the cafeteria as a learning laboratory for the school community  
Educate the students about the role of good nutrition as one part of a healthy lifestyle  
Integrate the cafeteria into all phases of the educational process

Advice: Use the freshest and most wholesome products that are available

All their produce was sourced. They also received 48k grant from dept of agriculture.

Add a sentence in the grant — request for equipment that would facilitate the use of locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables.

“We need to stop looking at school food service as an expense to our schools but as an investment in our children’s healthy futures.”

He attended the Alliance for a Healthy Generation Conference 2007

Food service is the money making entity inside schools. It is important to change perception of food service inside of schools...as people who are trying to give students the nutrients they need.

**Tony Geraci, Baltimore City Food Service Director/ Baltimore, MD (contact Tegan Hagy, [thagy@thefoodtrust.org](mailto:thagy@thefoodtrust.org))**

Worked in Chinese international schools and came back to the states to change things

“Baltimore is a broken school district.”

They feed 85,000 kids a week free and reduced lunch rates. “If you look at the trash that is on the ground that is what they eat.”

Believes kids have to be part of the process at every step of the way.

With the help of parent and student volunteers they are refurbishing the Bragg Nature Center in the middle of the city—33 acres of farmland. The government in Baltimore said, “You can have it, but you don’t get any money and Make It Work.” Geraci brought together the towns and children to clear the land—a farm manager was hired by the school district.

The kids together with parents and community members rehabbed the farm. He has to get financial backing. “You have to have a financial driver to make this kind of project happen.”

Right now they are growing and selling Mediterranean and oriental micro-greens. They also have vegetables, fruits, mushroom, goats, pigs, chickens, worms and more.

Used goats to clear the field—He said you would have thought they were a “herd of unicorn.” Families would come for the day just to see the goats. They had never seen a goat in the inner city before.

We start seeds in the greenhouses for the school gardens—212 schools.  
2,500 kids have been to the farm.

Where they also sell office plants, kids can’t learn how to cook. “juniors and seniors are in their cafeterias and they understand professional kitchens.”

He bought peaches from Maryland at 8 cents a piece and watch kids taste them for the first time. He believes the program will change the face of the way Maryland does business for their children.

“The single most powerful tool in the planet is to let kids plant a seed and let it grow. It forever transforms the way they eat food.”

Student designed mini-projects:

- \*kids are involved as entrepreneurs selling fresh fruit and vegetables
- \*compost is from organic food waste from cafeteria
- \*students made wind chimes out of found glass
- \*kids designed their logo—system wide contest and named it Great Kids Farm.
- \* kids will help to design the meals

In order to introduce the new foods to the students they developed a program where students were invited to take **No thank you bites**. When they tried something new they received a star and once they had accumulated enough stars they received a gift. It became competitive. They were asked what they liked about the foods they liked and what they would do to change it.

What works in Baltimore works in Atlanta, Chicago, works with 20 largest urban school districts in America.

“These kids are going to make choices about *your* choices in the future. You need to step up to the plate today. Go to a local farm and bring produce into your school. This is something you can do to change lives of children”

Kids work after school and weekends at the farm, which hosts a Future Farmer’s of America club. There are plans to implement a national training center for national farm to school program in the future.

Geraci approaches the farm with as much diversity as possible. The farm can’t sustain the kids in all food systems but it is used a testing ground...he purposefully built this program with the farming community.

On staff they have one farm manager and one horticulturalist.

Geraci received \$3 million in grant money including green building grants. He says he is shameless about going to manufacturer and saying this is a great opportunity to show your wares when he goes to manufacturers.

**Question: how to best support the food service folks within the system?**

Get involved in the community and figure out what is going on in the community before you think it is bad. As a community, it is important to have healthier food for our children.

**How to make a farm to school project work?**

1. Talk to the people, write the specifications, talk to the school board members....
2. Must be an all school effort
3. If the school is working with farm to school make sure to invite the food service director.
4. Sponsor a community day luncheon at the school—everyone involved eat in the cafeteria
5. Meet with the school boards because when children see their parents involved in their environment it is particularly powerful...
6. Get good press for your food service director local media could do a piece to give him/her some recognition.

7. Look at it from the green jobs perspective . Look beyond produce and buy bread, eggs, cheese makers/people who process their own blueberries and peaches//
- 8 Begin with four items/corn/green beans/carrots and peas.