



## **PRINCETON AREA: First New Jersey Farm-to-School Conference slated for April 18 in Lawrence**

Farm-to-school programs connect school meals with local agriculture

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Josh Viertel, president of Slow Food USA, will give the keynote address at the first-ever New Jersey Farm-to-School Conference on April 18 at the Lawrenceville School.

A network of some 30 groups from around New Jersey, including chefs, food service professionals, parents, teachers, farmers, food access advocates, the state Department of Agriculture and Rutgers Cooperative Extension, are teaming up to present the state's first-ever New Jersey Farm-to-School Conference on Saturday, April 18, from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., at the Lawrenceville School in Lawrence.

According to Beth Feehan, one of the group's organizers, "The New Jersey Farm-to-School Network clearly defines its mission as supporting a wide range of local, healthy food in school projects, including an increase in cafeterias sourcing from New Jersey farms; the establishment of school gardens programs that expose youth to food production; nutrition and cooking education; recycling, and more."

With growing awareness of the need for farm-to-school programs and increasing demand for information, resources and support, the New Jersey Farm-to-School Network determined that a statewide educational conference would be its best first step.

At the outset of the event, conference goers will be addressed by Emma Davis-Kovacs, director of the

Division of Food & Nutrition in the New Jersey Department of Agriculture. Josh Viertel, the president of Slow Food USA, will give the keynote address.

Prior to becoming Slow Food USA's first president in October 2008, Mr. Viertel made significant contributions to the sustainable food movement as an educator, organic farmer, activist, and board member of Slow Food USA and its subsidiary organization, Slow Food Nation.

Along with spearheading SFUSA's work with youth and student activists, Mr. Viertel is credited with co-founding and co-directing the Yale Sustainable Food Project, which has evolved into being a leader in the international sustainable food movement.

The conference's topics will include "School Gardens: Food & Fun," offering information about creating and maintaining successful programs; "Farm-to-School Policy: Strategies for Success;" "Connecting Farms to Cafeterias: Food Service Director Perspectives," and "Connecting to the Classroom: Curriculum Ties and Food Education."

Since its inception, the New Jersey Farm-to-School Network has worked hand-in-hand with the National Farm-to-School Network and with Tegan Hagy of The Food Trust in Philadelphia, who serves as Mid-Atlantic Farm-to-School coordinator.

"Farm-to-school programs connect school meals with local agriculture — a strategy that can improve the quality of school meals, increase the profitability of farming, and re-create relationships in the community among consumers and the people who grow their food," Ms. Hagy said. Children's health and farm viability are at the heart of the issue.

According to recent statistics, 27 percent of U.S. children are overweight (this figure has doubled in the past 10 years) and, for the first time in 200 years, today's children are expected to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents'.

Meanwhile, U.S. farmers' share of every food dollar has dropped to 19 cents currently from 41 cents in 1950, and food typically travels from 1,500 to 2,400 miles from farm to plate. For instance, a head of California lettuce shipped to New Jersey requires 36 times more energy to transport than the caloric food energy it provides.

Ms. Hagy believes the future is bright for the farm-to-school movement in the Garden State, saying "New Jersey has an incredibly rich agricultural history, and is ripe with opportunity. Farms and school systems are both important parts of New Jersey's communities. Unfortunately, at some point between the inception of the National School Lunch program and present, many school food services have lost their connection to family farms," she said.

"The time has come to realize that feeding our children high quality and nutritious foods, preserving farm land, and developing local food systems are integral developments for the health of our communities that will pay off tenfold in the future," Ms. Hagy said.

Gary Giberson, founder and president of Sustainable Fare, the food service provider at The Lawrenceville School, said that the school is "delighted" to host the conference, saying, "This dovetails perfectly with our Green Campus Initiative, the school's ongoing holistic approach to campus sustainability. The conference will provide an exceptional opportunity for us to discuss our successes and learn from experts who share our goal of sustainable dining practices."

The conference fee is \$25, which includes a locally-sourced meal sponsored by Sustainable Fare.  
Scholarships are available.

The event is presented with generous support from The Lawrenceville School, Sustainable Fare, Edible Jersey magazine, Steve & Cookies by the Bay Restaurant in Margate, the Mid-Atlantic Farm-to-School Network, Eat Local of Ringwood, the Margate City Farmers Market, and Maschio's Food Services, Inc.

For more information, visit [www.njfarmtoschool.org](http://www.njfarmtoschool.org) or call 609-577-5113. On the Web:  
[www.lawrenceville.org](http://www.lawrenceville.org).  
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