



# CENTER *for* RURAL AFFAIRS

YOUR RURAL NEWS FOR OVER 40 YEARS | LYONS, NE | POPULATION 851 | OCTOBER 2015

Photo by Kelly Sikkema



## WHERE'S THE BEEF?

### NEBRASKA RANCHERS BRING THE BEEF TO SCHOOL

BY SARAH SMITH, SARAH@CFRA.ORG

**W**ith more than 6 million beef cattle raised in Nebraska, and agriculture's hold as the state's top industry, why are Nebraska's students not served local beef on their lunch trays?

Thayer County beef producer and chairman for the Titan Beef Boosters, Rob Marsh, got to the bottom of the problem.

Marsh garnered support from local beef producers and community. To date, 32 beef have been committed over the next 3 years (valued at \$45,000), as well as \$34,000 in support funds for processing and packaging the animals.

A Community Foundation will manage funds and provide tax incentives for donations. A local grocer is providing freezer space. Organizations like the Nebraska Beef Council are providing promotional and educational opportuni-



ties for the students. And USDA processing facilities for slaughter and packaging were located.

Finally, critical players at the school level came enthusiastically on board. The Food service director agreed to increase beef

Community members are helping fuel the students at Thayer Central Community Schools, home of the Titans, with local beef.

by 50 percent on the menu. Why not when your budget will benefit, students waste less food because it tastes better, and your community applauds the effort.

With 312,602 Nebraska students, the potential is great when serving and promoting local beef. There is value in students knowing where their food comes from. And by keeping more dollars local, with our Nebraska beef producers and processors, economic benefits would be exponential.

Thayer Central Community Schools tied the pieces together, joining support from school, community, and farmers/ranchers. We believe this program is a model others across the country will be inspired to replicate.

# STUDENTS, FARMERS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS CELEBRATE THIS MONTH

BY ELISHA SMITH, ELISHAS@CFRA.ORG

October is National Farm to School month (#F2SMonth). “Farm to School” refers to schools serving local, farm-fresh foods ranging from fruits and veggies to honey and meat.

The more local foods we serve our kids, the better. One-third of US children are obese or overweight, and only 2 percent of children get the recommended serving of fruits and vegetable each day. Farm to School programs increase students’ daily fruit and vegetable consumption significantly.

And each dollar invested into Farm to School stimulates an additional \$2.16 of local economic activity. In Maine, shifting 1 percent of consumer expenditures to direct purchasing of local products was shown to increase incomes of Maine farmers by as much as 5 percent. And each new Farm to School job contributes to the creation of an additional 1.67 jobs.

Often schools incorporate curriculums to help students learn about nutrition, agriculture, science, math, and the path food takes from the farm to the table. They create experience-based learning opportunities by visiting farms and participating in gardening, recycling, and entrepreneurial programs.

The Farm to School concept is simple: bring tasty, nutritious

food from the people who grow it to the school kids who want to eat it. The details involved in making this a reality can be daunting, however. With that in mind the Center for Rural Af-

fairs has put together a Farm to School Month Starter Kit, guide, and several other resources to help wade through all the complexities. Visit [cfra.org/f2s](http://cfra.org/f2s) to learn more.

## IT'S OFFICIAL! NEBRASKA FARM TO SCHOOL MONTH PROCLAIMED



Photo: Office of the CIO

We often talk about farm to school being a win-win-win for all: students, farmers, and communities. That was evident at the Nebraska State Capital Building when Governor Pete Ricketts signed a proclamation declaring October as Farm to School Month in Nebraska.

Joining the Center for Rural Affairs at this celebratory event were representatives from York Public Schools, East Butler Public Schools, Omaha Public Schools, Thayer County beef producers and specialty crop growers, and the Nebraska Department of Education. Local melons and veggies supplied by Hintz Produce were presented to the governor in an overflowing basket.

With active Farm to School programs in all 50 states, wherever you reside, you can get in on the action! If you're not sure where to turn, you'll find state-specific information at [farmtoschool.org/our-network](http://farmtoschool.org/our-network). Photo courtesy of the Nebraska Office of the Chief Information Officer.

### PAPER & E-NEWS

This newsletter is available both electronically and in print. To receive it online, sign up at the Center's website, [cfra.org](http://cfra.org), or email us at [info@cfra.org](mailto:info@cfra.org).

You may also correct your mailing address and fax the back page to 402.687.2200, or call the Center for Rural Affairs at 402.687.2100.

Editing and layout by Marie Powell and Casey Francis.

The Center for Rural Affairs was incorporated as a private nonprofit organization on September 5, 1973.





# SCHOOL GREENHOUSE GROWS INTEREST IN HEALTHY EATING AND AGRICULTURE

BY JACKIE JANSSEN, LITCHFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOL

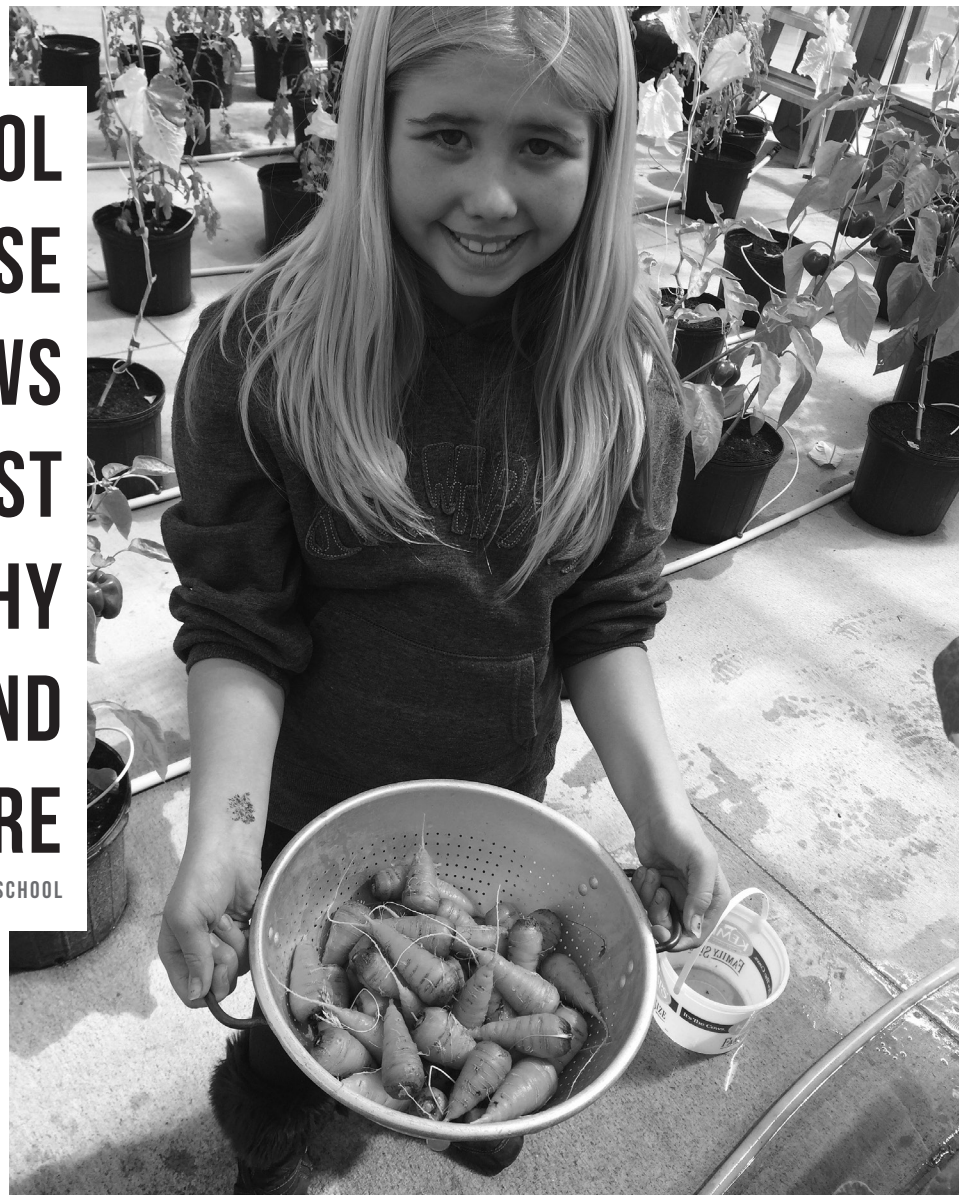
**H**ere in Litchfield, Nebraska, we not only get to enjoy all of the wonderful vegetables at lunch, but we also get to use the greenhouse as a learning experience.

We are fortunate to have a local businessman who built a greenhouse for the Litchfield Public School to use.

Last year was the pilot year for this project. The first thing we had to do was to organize a committee to work with the greenhouse manager. Our committee consists of: the school principal, the head cook, the school nurse, the high school FFA instructor, and an elementary coordinator.

At the beginning of the year, our high school FFA students helped to set up tables, pots, soil, and the irrigation system. The elementary students were able to go down and help put soil in the pots. What fun they had playing with dirt!

The upper elementary students



A student at the Litchfield Public School displays the bounty of the school greenhouse. Students from kindergarten to high school helps make the greenhouse successful for both growing food and learning.

grades planted garlic and onions in cups that they were able to take home later in the year.

In the classroom, we used our newfound knowledge in a lot of journal writing. For our end of the year project, we decided to have the students host an open house for parents and community members.

Our fifth and sixth grade students were divided into pairs and assigned a vegetable. They had to research the vegetable, create a small report, and be prepared to share the information during the

Our high school FFA students were the greeters during the open house. They helped serve food, and tried to answer the many questions people had about the greenhouse operations. The fifth and sixth graders were stationed at their vegetable table and gave information about each one. The night was a huge success!

Our pilot year for the greenhouse was well worth the time. We have noticed that the kids are a lot more willing to eat vegetables that they help grow! We hope to incorporate even more activities this year.



The kids in Fremont, Nebraska, enjoyed all aspects of gardening from digging in the dirt to showing off their vegetables from their After School Garden. Photo courtesy of Fremont Community Learning Center.



# KIDS, CARROTS & SCHOOL GARDENS

BY JOHN CRABTREE, JOHNC@CFRA.ORG

**N**othing says happy and healthy like an image of children gardening, harvesting, and eating carrots, beets, cabbages, cucumbers, etc.

The Summer “Out of School” Program students in Fremont, Nebraska, got to do just that when they helped create an After School Garden at Linden Elementary in Fremont.

With the support of the school district and the Linden administration, and the help of local volunteers, two raised bed gardens were constructed. The students took ownership over the work of caring for the garden.

In July, the students set up a produce stand to market their harvest. Word is they are still deciding whether to funnel the money back into the garden or donate it to a worthy local cause. I’ll be honest; I sort of hope they put it back into the garden.

These activities involved significant educational opportunities. Students learned about teamwork and shared decision-making as they negotiated what would be planted where.

They learned about plant science, math skills and measurements in the garden, as well as learning math skills while handling money and making change at the produce stand, where each of the students took a half hour “shift” at the table. And they continue to learn about nutrition and healthy food choices.

Personally, I think growing a cabbage is one of the great educational opportunities available to anyone. And I hope children in after school and summer “out of school” programs everywhere get a chance to garden like the kids in Fremont have.