

Illinois Farm to School Network

MIGHTY MINI VIDEO: EXTENDING THE HARVEST



Slide One: Welcome!

Hello and welcome to our Mighty Mini Video on Extending the Season, presented by the Illinois Farm to School Network. My name is Diane Chapeta. I am a former Wisconsin school nutrition director, and the current network coordinator for the Illinois Farm to School Network. I will be your host today as we explore Extending the Harvest for Farm to School.

All of our Mighty Mini Videos are available on our website in a PDF format, as well a presentation format.

Slide Two: Season Extenders



Midwest schools are on an opposing schedule when it comes to utilizing local, fresh produce in their meal programs. When school starts the season is already slowing down and comes to an abrupt end well before winter break. Locally sourcing produce can be difficult and very limited during winter months. But, there are ways to extend the season for schools located with winter climates. **Schools across the Midwest have** discovered ways to utilize fresh, local produce at the height of the season, thus saving money and creating an opportunity to add

more local produce to winter menus. Districts in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa and Michigan are putting up the harvest at the peak of the season and storing local produce as ingredients to be used in menus throughout the school year. These schools have developed an efficient process to freeze vegetables and local fruits as ingredients, thus reducing the cost of local produce while adding nutritional value to their menus.

Many schools hold a “freezing day” in July, August or September to “put up” or preserve local produce at the peak of harvest. School kitchen staff come in over the summer utilizing a skeletal staff. Other schools bring in additional labor or staff for a work day once school is back in session. Some schools have added these activities into the regular workday to avoid incurring additional labor costs. Schools utilizing outside volunteers in the kitchens and cafeteria engage those same volunteers in preserving the harvest activities, supervised by trained staff. In each case, the method utilized to extend the produce season was fitted to the staff and the schedule of the individual schools. This allowed for the development of the best practices for each kitchen facility involved. **And freezing isn’t the only method** being utilized to extend the season! Smaller districts have found using dehydrators, either purchased with grant funding, or available at local food hubs and processing kitchens, are a great method of processing for local fruits and tomatoes at the height of the season. These dried items make great additions to their winter recipes and menus.

Slide Three: Freezing Seasonal Produce

Freezing fresh produce at the height of the season can add variety, as well as provide a local flavor bump for recipes and menus during the cold, winter months. Do you have recipes that call for grated or sliced vegetables such as Morning Glory muffins, stir fry, hot vegetable side dishes or soups and stews? Then, freezing select vegetables in late summer may benefit your meal program.

When you consider freezing seasonal vegetables in late summer for use during the winter months, there are several factors that can make or break your future



plans. Be sure to consider all the important factors when deciding if this is a good fit for your program and your staff.

We will have many websites loaded with information to explore in the PDF version of this presentation.

If you don't utilize scratch recipes, and would like to discover ways to incorporate scratch cooking, check out our upcoming Mighty Mini Video on Scratch Conversion for School Menus. This video will be posted in November, 2016.

Useful Websites:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/Preserving.pdf>

http://www.iowafoodandfitness.org/uploads/PDF_File_97662299.pdf

Slide Four: A Tale of Two Schools

These are two case studies in preserving the harvest:

Viroqua Public Schools, in Viroqua, WI started their harvest project, the Fifth Season, through a partnership with a local food company, Organic Valley and grant funds. The district hired a local chef to assist in training and planning throughout the project. The Food Service Manager, Marylyn Volden began the program to increase her farm to school efforts and improve recipes. Each August the staff processes shredded carrots and zucchini and roasts vegetables for ratatouille, a roasted vegetable blend which usually includes eggplant, tomatoes, zucchini, peppers and onions and is seasoned with herbs and garlic. The amounts of processed food began at 600 pounds and rapidly grew each year to 1200 pounds in 2015. Product is kept frozen in food safe tubs, and in vacuum sealed bags.

Link to the video explaining their process: <http://www.nfsmi.org/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=402>

Sibley East High School, in Arlington MN started their school FFA garden project in 2010 with one acre of vegetables managed by 300 high school students. Everything they grew that first year ended up in the school kitchens and was added to the tray. The students plan and execute the garden project every year. The garden is currently 3.5 acres and half of what they plant is sold as CSA shares for staff and local families. Produce raised for the school kitchen is processed during the summer including freezer salsa, scratch chili ingredients, freezer Cole slaw, pureed pumpkin for scratch chili and for baking, and shredded carrots and zucchini for quick breads.

Link to the video explaining the garden project at Sibley East:

<http://communityblueprint.com/portfolio/growing-a-better-school-lunch/>

Slide Five: No Freezer space? No problem!



Freezing fresh produce isn't the only way to extend the harvest.

Dehydrating fresh produce at the height of the season when pricing is at its lowest, and flavor at its peak, is a great way to extend the harvest at school. Whether the produce is coming from a school garden, or local growers, with a skeletal crew school kitchens can dehydrate and store many varieties of produce in a minimal amount of time. Dry storage that is at or lower than 75 degrees or refrigerated storage is acceptable for dehydrated foods.

Dehydrators for institutional use run from \$150 to \$900 for a 9 or 10 tray unit. Dehydrators for seasonal preserving can be added to school food equipment grants, as well as become a part of a larger grant with a health organization partner.

Here is a list of the types of produce and proteins that can be useful when dehydrated:

- Tomatoes
- Carrots
- Summer squash
- Winter squash
- Onions
- Green Beans
- Beets

Blueberries

Cherries

Cranberries

Bananas

Chick Peas

Butter Beans

Check our PDF version of this training video for links to websites with food service quality dehydrators, recipes and processes for dehydrating just about anything.

Links to Dehydrating Tips and Recipes Websites:

<http://www.backpackingchef.com/dehydrating-vegetables.html>

<http://urbansurvivalsite.com/13-things-to-know-before-you-dehydrate-food/>

Links to examples of food service quality dehydrators:

<http://www.dprestaaurantsupply.com/Excalibur-3926TB-9-Tray-Food-Dehydrator-Black.html>

<http://www.consolidatedfoodservice.com/food-dehydrators>

<http://www.meatprocessingproducts.com/seeallde.html?gclid=CLiik4mkrc8CFdgRgQodRiUMoA>

Slide Six: Facility and Capability

When considering extending the harvest at school there are many points to consider, including your facility and your staff's capabilities.

Here are several important points to consider when planning a seasonal harvest day in your kitchen.

Is your kitchen equipped to process raw vegetables with knives and cutting boards, or food processors?

If you are already cooking recipes for your menus, then your kitchen has the equipment needed to cut vegetables. If you do not have adequate equipment, or you would like to increase efficiency and upgrade equipment, there are grants which can supplement equipment purchases. The USDA has Fuel Up and Play 60 equipment grants for schools, as well as the NSLP Equipment Assistance Grant. The link to an overview of these grants is located on the PDF version of this video. http://www.isbe.net/nutrition/htmls/nslp_grant.htm



Does your staff have the knowledge and skills needed to process vegetables?

If you perform scratch cooking in your program, then your staff may have the skills needed to process raw vegetables. If not, you may need to consider providing a training for knife skills and equipment usage. Is there a local chef or partner organization in your area that you can work with to train staff? Look for like-minded local chefs or an organization focused on health and begin a conversation about your plans to extend the harvest at school.

Do you have storage capabilities to house local frozen foods through the winter months?

Freezer space can be a complicated issue for many schools. It can sometimes feel like there is never enough space for all those commodities and added frozen purchases. When deciding if seasonal extension methods are a good fit for your facility, reviewing your frozen commodity purchases and other frozen purchases from the previous year can shed light on ways to reorganize and streamline how much you purchase versus when those items are utilized. Are there ways to reduce the purchases of frozen vegetables through other vendors, and replace them with local options? Can you adjust the flow of frozen commodities so they are used up faster thus overall storage space is increased? A review of food item usage and readjustment of purchasing practices can provide the needed space for local foods in the freezer.

Is your staff available, and allowed, to work one or two days in late August before school begins?

Is your staff supported by a union? Are there rules about maximum hours per school year for food service staff? Knowing and understanding staff limitations and abilities is one of the key factors to developing a seasonal processing day in August. Is there time on the school calendar to set a processing date during staff orientation week? Are staff members available to work one full day in the kitchen prior to opening day? These are all important considerations.

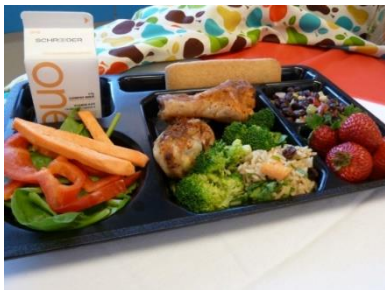
Are food service facilities being cleaned or is maintenance being done in August?

Knowing the summer schedule for maintenance and cleaning is also important when planning a work day in August. Have a conversation with the head of the department responsible for these functions before you set plans to operate your facility in August.

Slide Seven: A Checklist for Cost

This slide provides a check list of important costs to tabulate when pricing out your extended season ingredients. Working through all of the points above will provide an ingredient cost that is accurate.

- Labor rate per hour
- Labor hours required
- Supervision cost
- Unprocessed to Processed Yields
- Produce raw cost per pound
- Delivery charges
- Packaging



Slide Eight: Menu Format and Food Safety

Consider your menu format and food safety when adding seasonal extender produce items. Do you utilize recipes during the school year that would be a good fit for local, frozen vegetables?

Reviewing your menus and recipes is important when deciding to process raw vegetables for later use. Look for opportunities to insert local frozen vegetables into your existing recipes. If you are using single frozen vegetables or a frozen vegetable blend for winter stir fries, sides, soups or casseroles creating a similar

local product would be a great substitute. Do you make muffins or breakfast breads? Review your menus and the corresponding recipes to reveal the possibilities of adding a local flavor bump. Remember, only process what you will use in one school year!

Do you have HACCP processes written for handling raw vegetables, and for monitoring frozen foods storage?

Do you know what FIFO means? Do you have SOP's for daily activities in your kitchen? Of course you do! Processing raw vegetables for later use can be as simple as writing a frozen vegetable recipe and an accompanying Standard of Practice (SOP) which spells out a set process for each type of vegetable product you will be creating. Whether it's grated carrots for baked goods and soups, or a roasted ratatouille for pizzas, marinara sauce and side dishes it's the process that counts! Be sure your new recipes for frozen vegetables are prepared safely and stored safely throughout the school year.

Links to Wisconsin school districts and their efforts to extend the season are located on the PDF version of this video, as well as several websites featuring from scratch recipes for schools.

<http://rethinkwinnebago.blogspot.com/2014/08/cooking-up-ratatouille-for-school.html>

http://lacrossetribune.com/vernonbroadcaster/lifestyles/versatile-ratatouille-returns-to-menu-at-viroqua-schools/article_8ce7e44f-e207-584b-9df9-6cf7757f2e7b.html

<http://www.slideshare.net/iowafoodandfitness/viroqua-farm-to-school>

Here are several recipe websites for school food service.

<http://www.thelunchbox.org/recipes-menus/recipes/>

https://www.healthiergeneration.org/live_healthier/eat_healthier/recipes/?gclid=CLr1qIb-k88CFUovgQod6icIPA

<http://www.k12.wa.us/ChildNutrition/Programs/NSLBP/pubdocs/ChildNutritionRecipeBook.pdf>

<https://www.educateiowa.gov/pk-12/nutrition-programs/quick-links-nutrition/learning-tools-nutrition/iowa-gold-star-cycle-menus>

Slide Nine: Procurement and Cost- Utilizing the Imperfect Veggie Imperfect veggies? Perfect!

When planning to process fresh, local or regional vegetables it's easy to see imperfect is perfect for your applications. Utilizing imperfect vegetables can lead to a cost reduction, and can give local farmers a market place for those unusual looking vegetables. Be sure to specify the required points, or guidelines for the quality of imperfect vegetables including no rot or mold, bug infestation, excess dirt or deep cracks on the vegetables you are purchasing. If you are clear on the specs, or quality requirements, for your imperfect veggie order, growers will fully understand your needs and can supply your program with those "odd looking" vegetables.



For further information, a link to the USDA Introduction to Fresh Produce Quality for Schools is located on the PDF version of this video.

http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/quality_intro.pdf

Can you locate sources for procuring local vegetables in August?

If you operate a smaller district, or a single, school facility looking for sources to buy fresh produce at the height of the growing season can be easy. Farmer's markets, produce auctions and local area farms will present opportunities for the purchase of imperfect produce. Exploring your options and developing a relationship with individual growers prior to the beginning of high season will give them needed time to estimate quantities of imperfect vegetables and pricing. Be sure to consider delivery or pick up and seasonal timing based on weather trends for your area. Be aware of rainfall versus sunny days during the months prior to the seasonal vegetable glut, and stay in contact with your preferred sources to trouble shoot in advance any issues due to usual or extreme weather conditions.

Are you in a mid-sized or larger district? Connecting with a regional produce house to discuss your project prior to the growing season will help to develop a process for sourcing regional veggies in mid to late August. Be sure to have quantities and quality requirements written out before the conversation begins. No imperfect veggies available? Bid out standard, regional veggies instead.



Slide Ten: What's next? Promote!!! Promote your project and your new menu items!

Extending the harvest through processing seasonal, local vegetables and incorporating them into existing, or new recipes is no small task! Be sure to share your wonderful achievement with students, families and staff members in your school community. Here are a few ways to promote your Extending the Seasons project.

Plan a free event like a back to school movie night featuring "Ratatouille", the movie and the pizza! Or, set up a table at a Back to

School Night, or a school supply pick up day. Display photos of your "seasonal" production crew in action, alongside pictures of the farms involved in sourcing the project. Providing small samples of upcoming items listed on fall and winter menus will drive interest in these special additions. Little tastes of muffins, ratatouille pizza or other redeveloped recipes will score big with students and parents. List your accomplishments in

pounds- showing your school community how many pounds of deliciousness will be hitting the lunch menus this fall!

Create a lunchtime taste-test event in your cafeteria encouraging students to taste your upcoming recipes utilizing the frozen bounty of summer! Set up a tasting table manned by your staff and cooking, sustainability, science or ag students. Share a freezing chart to demonstrate your methods, or encourage your student partners to share information on the seasons or perhaps information on how local veggies are grown. Use a catchy and whimsical display to attract attention and draw your students to the tasting table. Themed tables, including a mini beach scene with summer veggies lounging in the sand, and pictures of your final products ready for the freezer, are a great way to get the message across to students of all ages! Share the new and improved menu items, sampling tastes of the months to come. Get creative and educate your students!

Slide Eleven: Thank you for watching!

Thank you for watching this instalment of the Illinois Farm to School Networks' Mighty Mini Video series. If you have questions, please connect with us online at: <http://illinoisfarmtoschool.org/>
Have a productive day!

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