

## Wisconsin Farm to School success stories

# Sheboygan Falls: Farm to High School



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Farm to school typically conjures images of a young child tasting their first cherry tomato, excitedly digging up a carrot, or squeamishly holding a red wriggler worm. But farm to school can also involve high school agriculture students engaged in hands-on soil science experiments, talented culinary students developing new recipes, and creative entrepreneurs selling produce grown at their schools. While elementary schools are a natural target for farm to school efforts, Sheboygan Falls has reaped the educational benefits of farm to high school by creating opportunities for older students to learn about food and agriculture.

For more than a decade, Sheboygan Falls High School students have actively engaged in local agricultural endeavors. Before they had a school garden, students volunteered at Restoration Farms, a community garden several miles from town. In 2012, Agriculture Teacher and FFA Advisor Bruce Brunner led the effort to construct a high-tunnel hoop house and outdoor garden space to provide those hands-on horticultural education opportunities on campus.

Soon, food production expanded to include beehives, an orchard and a chicken coop with laying hens, providing an outdoor classroom for authentic learning in horticulture, biology, engineering and animal science. Students not only take classes in the growing space during the school year, but some also extend their education into the summer season. During the break, the most passionate students receive class credit and a monetary stipend to work with Brunner and assistant Michelle Spielvogel to keep the garden thriving all summer long.

### Sharing the harvest

Sheboygan Falls Food Service Director Amy Lawrenz and her team are committed to preserving the garden's bounty at peak summer harvest for use when the students return in the fall. In the summer of 2015, the district was able to core, blanch and freeze over 1,000 pounds of tomatoes from the school's hoop house.

Encouraged by this success, in 2016 Lawrenz hired Spielvogel and another garden specialist to build the school's capacity for food preservation. By processing and freezing even more tomatoes, squash and cucumbers from the garden, the school nutrition services staff was able to prepare and serve school-grown tomato sauce, salsa and Minestrone soup throughout the academic year. Season-extending technologies like the school's hoop house also allow the food service staff to feature fresh school-grown items, year-round. The food service program purchases all of the school garden produce they use, helping to financially sustain farm to school activities.

In partnership with the food service staff, Culinary Teacher Diana Woodworth actively involves students in developing recipes for the school cafeteria. In



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– Amy Lawrenz,  
Sheboygan Falls  
Food Service Director





addition, small focus groups of students will taste-test the recipes before they are featured as an option on the lunch menu, which helps ensure that the offerings will be well-received by the rest of the student body. By combining student-grown ingredients with culinary education and student input, the nutrition services staff is seeing Sheboygan Falls High School students develop healthier eating habits. “The kids get so excited when they know their own produce is on the line,” shares Lawrenz.

### **Food entrepreneurship**

Farm to school activities easily fit into biology, agriculture and culinary science curricula, but Sheboygan Falls High School has found that business entrepreneurship is another educational outcome of their program. Students sell the fresh produce and eggs they produce to school staff and community members at the high school’s Cornucopia Farmers Market Stand, where they develop financial management and marketing skills.

Through the culinary sciences program, students learn about product testing and development, turning the bounty of the school garden into jellies, jams and other value-added products. This exposure to entrepreneurial education has even inspired some students to start their own agricultural and food-related businesses.

### **Mentors in the field**

Sheboygan students are fortunate to have community mentors like local farmer Peter Seely, who gives students exposure to farming as a career and livelihood. Every summer, the garden interns venture out to Seely’s 35-acre Springdale CSA Farm and learn

what it takes to produce vegetables for 800 families. “Farmer Pete” has also generously volunteered his time to build the garden facility at the school, including an integral role in constructing their high-tunnel hoop house in 2012. The Sheboygan Falls food service purchases produce from Seely to supplement the food grown in the school garden. Strong relationships with local farmers and community agricultural educators have enriched and sustained the Sheboygan Falls farm to high school program.

### **Recipe for success**

Sheboygan Falls High School did not immediately dive into all of the many elements of its farm to school program. Rather, the school built its program step by step, drawing upon dedicated school leaders, strong communication systems and a supportive school community to further their progress. As Lawrenz advises, “Start small, and build from that. Have something to be positive about.”

With each success, the program has gained support and interest. As the school’s food and agriculture program has expanded, the farm to school champions have stayed in regular communication with each other to coordinate activities. Lawrenz, Brunner, Woodworth and other dedicated staff members provide strong and consistent leadership, but they could not do it without the support of parents, local farmers, kitchen staff and students along the way.

Four years after its school garden installation, Sheboygan Falls High School was honored with a 2016 USDA “One in a Melon” award for farm to school leadership in Wisconsin. Through careful planning and coordination, the school’s farm to school team is cultivating a model farm to high school program that actively fosters the next generation of agricultural and culinary leaders.

