

YUMMY NORTHWEST

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SERVING IDAHO, MONTANA, OREGON, AND WASHINGTON

Get in line for a good lunch

There's something delicious on the menu in school cafeterias these days. Read on to learn about serving lunch in a school with nine students and how local fresh food is finding its way onto school lunch trays.

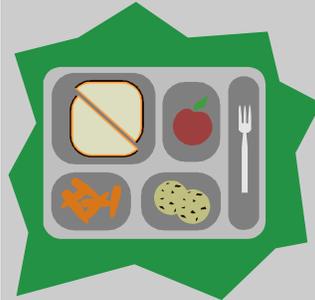
Hot and tasty in Greycliff

It was chili day at Greycliff Elementary School. Lunch lady Judy Hillner showed me around the kitchen (which took about five seconds in the closet-like space) and explained how she feeds nine kids every day. The only other school kitchen in the county serves 300-450 students a day at the grade school and high school in Big Timber.



JESSE IS READY TO EAT.

Government regulations require that USDA-approved recipes be used, but Judy sees more fresh foods and more nutritious



School Lunch Facts

The National School Lunch Program began in 1946 after many men going into the Armed Services could not pass their physicals due to malnutrition.

Commodity items used in school lunches are purchased through a national program to help farmers sell their crops.

A new lunch item can appear 10 times before students will accept it.

In Oregon, 47 million school lunches are served annually. Nationally, 30 million are served each day.

Action figure!

Yes, your very own plastic lunch lady will scoop out a pretend hot lunch just for you. Order from Archie McPhee at www.mcphee.com/items/11660.html.

menus being emphasized. She has been cooking lunch at Greycliff off and on since the 1980s. Back then, a local rancher brought fresh corn from his garden, although that wouldn't be allowed today due to regulations. Fresh produce arrives in Big Timber for Judy to pick up later because the deliveryman won't bring a mere \$50 order all the way out to Greycliff.



TARYN, DAVID, AND TREVOR WAIT WHILE JUDY HILLNER SERVES UP LUNCH.

With so few students, Judy can adjust recipes so that everyone will eat them. For example, onions and peppers are removed from the old recipe called Johnny Marzetti, leaving macaroni, tomato sauce, and mozzarella cheese. Any leftovers go into a future menu, so nothing is wasted.

I stayed for lunch, of course. The chili was delicious, accompanied by crackers and a topping of shredded cheese, along with 1/2 cup of applesauce (the minimum mandated by the government, although students could get seconds) and a few fresh carrots. A choice of plain or chocolate milk is included.

Some kids bring their own lunch, but I don't know how you can beat the \$1.50 price of the one Judy cooks up fresh.

Afterward, Judy showed me how quick cleanup is with only four plates and a handful of silverware.

Local Food and Your Schools

By The Growing Gardener

The recent increase in food prices has people talking more about the value of local food. The benefits for local economies, emergency preparedness, and climate protection are a few reasons why more and more people want to support local farmers. Local foods in school cafeterias is another interesting topic that has even inspired a documentary called "Two Angry Moms," a story about mothers who want their kids to have good food to eat at school. See www.angrymoms.org for tips on joining the good-food-in-school movement.

By bringing local food to school cafeterias, healthy eating for kids is a little closer to home as they begin to make the connection with the food they eat and the ground they walk on. Kids who get to experience growing their own fruits and vegetables, for example, in school gardens, experience tasting the food they have grown and learning about the origin of their food. This sensory experience alone has the ability to shape future food decisions. I still think of the carrots I loved to pull out of my mom's vegetable garden!

However, getting local food in the cafeteria is another challenge that will take time for many schools.

Some obstacles include large governmental agencies and associations with an interest in processed foods only. Other obstacles include limited growing seasons and challenges of processing and distribution.

However, despite these obstacles, many states, such as Oregon, are leaders in farm-to-school programs (www.ecotrust.org/farmtoschool), and Washington State passed the Local Farms - Healthy Kids Act in March 2008. This bill is a launching pad for the development of a state-wide food policy that includes a farm-to-school program.

Amazingly, the bill passed in the Washington legislature with all yea votes except for one. It's possible that some of the success of the bill was due to recent publicity about the benefits of local food.



What's for lunch?

Longing for good ol' school cafeteria tacos or pizza? Curious about what is in that "mystery meat" Stroganoff? Is your child begging you to make cinnamon rolls just like the lunch lady serves at school?

You can find USDA-approved school lunch recipes online at the National Food Service Management Institute Web site at www.nfsmi.org/Information/school_recipe_index_alpha.html.

To make your mouth water, here are some recipes you'll find:

Baked French Toast Strips
Broccoli Salad
Hummus
Oatmeal Cookies
Sloppy Joe on Roll
Stromboli
Tuna and Noodles
Vegetable Pizza

Vegan Lunch Box

The second edition of Jennifer McCann's creative cookbook is being published. You don't have to be vegan to love it. Find more information at veganlunchbox.blogspot.com.

This bill may be one of most comprehensive in regard to general food policy in the U.S. today.

Just a few exciting highlights include:

- * Requires all state food contracts to include a plan to maximize the availability of Washington food purchased.
- * Eliminates low-cost bidding requirements for school purchases of Washington-grown food and allows schools to adopt price preferences for local food.
- * Funds available for Washington-grown fresh fruit and vegetable snack programs.
- * Promotes school gardens for both food and education.
- * Provides funds for the purchase of wireless technology to allow farmers markets to accept both food stamps and credit cards.

You can read the details at environmentalpriorities.org/local-farms.

Many other states and communities are also forming farm-to-school initiatives. Montana passed a bill in 2007 specifically addressing the elimination of low-cost bidding requirements. The Bozeman school district buys 20 percent of its food from local producers. "Local" includes processed foods, such as bread and jam, as well as fresh food. You can learn more about Farm to School programs across the country at www.farmtoschool.org.

In Washington, you can contact the state Dept. of Agriculture to express your support or learn more about planning for the future of farming at agr.wa.gov/default.htm.

Citizen efforts can help make things happen faster!

The Growing Gardener is Gina Renee Lozier, a Seattle-area resident, a landscape and container garden designer, and an enthusiastic student of horticulture.

About Yummy Northwest

Each monthly issue highlights an edible delight available in the Pacific Northwest and Montana.

Contact the editor

Comments, corrections, topic ideas, and submissions are all most welcome at Yummy_Northwest@hotmail.com. View archives at yummynorthwest.com.