

September 5, 2006
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

4th Annual Maine Harvest Lunch *Local Produce Favored by Gorham Students*

Did you know that the average bite of food travels 1,400 miles before reaching your plate using up to 17 times more fossil fuel energy than food coming from local sources? On Wednesday, September 20th Gorham students in grades K-8 in will enjoy a menu of all Maine grown foods for lunch as part of the 4th annual Maine Harvest Lunch, which will reduce the average distance their food travels to less than 300 miles. **At Gorham Middle School, students will have a special guest joining them for lunch, Maine's First Lady Karen Baldacci.**

The Maine Harvest Lunch program is made possible by a collaboration between the Cumberland County Soil and Water Conservation District (CCSWCD), the Gorham School Nutrition Program, Gorham teachers and parent volunteers, Farm Fresh Connection and PROP's Communities Promoting Health Coalition (*a Healthy Maine Partnership*).

The first Maine Harvest Lunch took place in September of 2003 in the Gorham schools and was a huge success. "Hot lunch purchases increased by 33% and students and teachers raved about the quality of the food," says Ron Adams, Director of the Gorham School Nutrition Program. Due to the success of the annual Maine Harvest Lunch, Adams continues to include local produce regularly in his menus.

The effort to offer local foods in school cafeterias is part of a larger trend towards shortening the distance between field and fork. Martha Putnam of Farm Fresh Connection adds, "This also fits into a greater effort to bring more nutritious food to kids in school - nutrition that they need to do well."

Prior to the Maine Harvest Lunch, staff from the CCSWCD, PROP and Cultivating Community will visit and deliver local foods curriculum with approximately 50 classrooms in Gorham schools. Students will also participating in a creative poster contest to illustrate the importance of eating foods grown near their home. At the middle school, the lunch is tied in with the successful school garden program facilitated by the non-profit Cultivating Community. Local producers have been invited to the lunch, to provide a face to the food. During lunch, each item will be identified by the farm that produced it.

The goal of this program is to expand beyond the Gorham schools. Several school districts around the state are interested in replicating the Maine Harvest Lunch. Organizers recently presented at national conferences in Seattle and Los Angeles, and at numerous venues across the state of Maine in hopes of gaining the interest of other school Nutrition Program Directors.

Amanda Beal from PROP states, "It is important to share the success of this program with others who can do the same in their schools and communities. The connections that are built with the farmers present lasting opportunities to participate in a sustainable food system where the person growing our food is also our neighbor. By reducing the distance our food travels, we eat food that is fresher, more nutritious, helps to preserve open space, reduces fuel use, and ultimately keep jobs in Maine."

Media representatives are welcome at the Gorham Middle School during Maine Harvest Lunch on September 20th by appointment. If interested in covering this event, please contact Amanda Beal at (207) 807-2055.