

Grant to help put local, fresh foods in schools

A federal grant will pay for education, outreach and locally produced food.

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WALLA WALLA — Children in Walla Walla Public Schools will see more local, fresh foods in school lunches thanks to a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The \$96,000 grant will increase local foods and education in district schools, and will be administered by nutrition specialist Beth Thiel.

In her years as a volunteer with the district, Thiel helped establish the garden at Sharpstein Elementary and introduce curriculum related to the cultivation of the garden at the school. A district parent, Thiel has more recently worked to bring fresh food choices to Garrison Middle School.

Part of the grant will support education related to food and agriculture for students, staff and the greater community.

Thiel's new, grant-paid role in the district is as Farm to School grant coordinator. The grant will also go to buying more locally grown food to be served in the schools' cafeterias.

There is also the goal of expanding school gardens, teaching children about food and farming, and teach adults about preparing healthier meals.

The Farm-to-School effort kicked off this school year by offering more locally grown produce and goods in district schools. Local fruits and vegetables have all been sampled by district students who participate in the National School Lunch Program. All students have also been offered samples of locally grown food such as an asparagus day last year.

The National School Lunch Program now also requires all students receive at least a half cup of fruits and vegetables on their tray at every meal.

A goal of the Farm-to-School program is to get students to make healthier choices, by making fresh, local fruits and vegetables available more often. School gardens, cooking activities, visits to farms and meetings with farmers are part of the program.

District staff will also benefit from the grant through culinary classes, tours of local farms and meetings with chefs.

“The Nutrition Services Department is excited for the opportunity and now has the resources to build an excellent Farm-to-School program that will fit the needs of school children in Walla Walla,” said Pamela Milleson, director of nutrition services, in a statement. “We live in a unique area which can provide a variety of produce and educational experience for our students.”