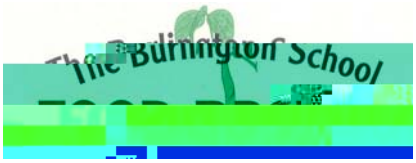


Burlington School Food Project
Evaluation Report Executive Summary
December 2006

Introduction

The Burlington School Food Project (BSFP) is a citywide collaborative formed to address the integration of local foods into school meals and food insecurity among school-aged children in Burlington, Vermont. The BSFP is a three-year USDA "Community Food Project" funded project. The Center for Rural Studies (CRS) at the University of Vermont is the external evaluator for this project and this evaluation report represents the third year of data collected from September 2005 to September 2006. Where appropriate, cumulative three year data is presented from fiscal years 2004 and 2005.

The Burlington School Food Project has three grant goals, upon which this evaluation report is based:

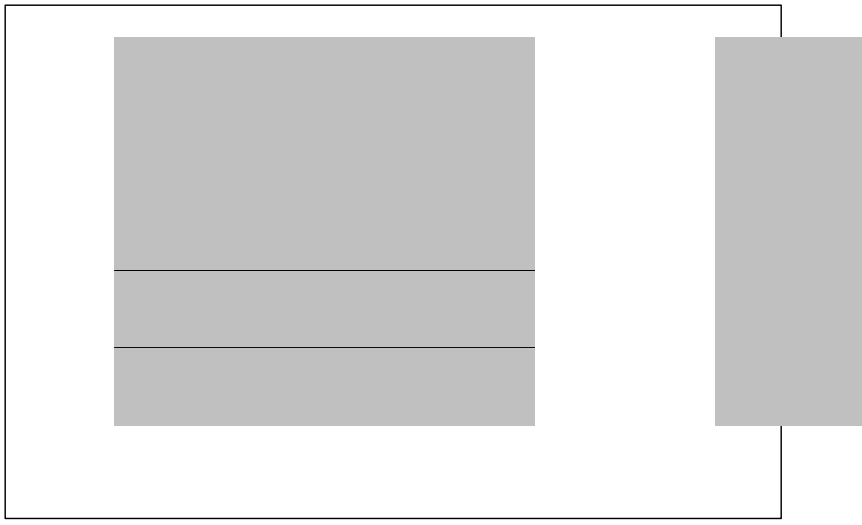
1. Burlington school children increase awareness and engagement in the local food system and increase awareness about, and consumption of healthy foods.
2. Burlington implements a food action plan that increases access to and use of healthy foods, and foods from local producers.
3. Burlington food, health, and education-oriented organizations and people build capacity (to include increased collaboration and leveraging and directing of funds) toward better meeting the food needs of the low-income Burlington School District student population.

Evaluation Methodology

The University of Vermont's Center for Rural Studies (CRS) is the third party evaluator of the BSFP. CRS conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the BSFP during the three-year project. Both quantitative and qualitative tools were created for stakeholders, including students, teachers, parents, local farmers, food service professionals, community members, and partners. The evaluation components included written surveys, in-depth interviews, focus groups, observations of events, and content analysis of BSFP related documents such as newspaper articles, newsletters and press releases. The model of evaluation documents the process and outcome of the project. Process refers to the activities conducted and outcome refers to the impact of these activities on the various stakeholders including children, teachers, farmers, project partners, and the community at large.

- The number of farms from which BSD purchased produce increased over the one year period from three to five local farms.
- Types of produce purchased include: kale, chard, carrots, raspberries, cherry tomatoes, basil, zucchini, strawberries, green leaf, red leaf, romaine, and mescaline lettuce, cucumbers, tomatoes, and peppers.

Many factors led to the **successful integration of food from local farms** into the BSD cafeterias. These factors include: relationship development between farmers and the BSD, use of the high school cafeteria to lightly process raw foods, availability and willingness of BSD to purchase fresh, local and/or organic produce that are of high quality, and student and volunteer involvement in the farm to school process. To purchase produce, the BSD contracted with and paid farmers up front for produce and the farmers planted the vegetables specifically designated for the schools.



school and larger community, as they enable the project to be sustainable after the funding is gone.

Three quarters (74%) of students who tried foods at the taste tests said the food was new to them and 43% are now more willing to try new foods because of their experience with the taste tests.

- Examples of reasons why students like to try new foods include: they might like it, a friend told them it was good, the food looks tasty or has a good aroma, to experience food from other cultures, and to have more variety of foods from which to choose.
- Most foods rated a 75% acceptance rate or better. Favorite items included whole wheat bread and cheese, applesauce muffins, and pesto pizza and least favorite items were broccoli and winter squash soup.
- The in-school taste test process made national news as the cover story in the magazine *Time for Kids* in October 2005.

As a result of the taste tests, Food Service staff slowly **integrated new foods into the school cafeteria menu.**

- Raw vegetables were to the sandwich and salad bars in the cafeteria, including cherry tomatoes, green and red lettuce, and whole wheat bread and cheese.
- Prepared items served on the monthly menu include minestrone soup, cinnamon applesauce, yogurt parfaits with granola, chicken Caesar salad, and pesto pasta.
- Samosas and calzones are produced off site by a local business and served on occasion during lunch.

While there is no one way to hold a taste test, here are some suggestions based on success at Edmunds Elementary School and Edmunds and Hunt Middle Schools.

- Involve students in process
- Involve volunteers
- Involve Food Service staff
- Involve and give teachers notice of taste tests
- Hire a farm-to-school coordinator
- Adequate time, money and resources
- Advertise taste tests and foods
- Advertise taste test foods incorporated into the school menu, emphasizing local and organic
- Organize the taste test process of food preparation, serving, and surveying of students

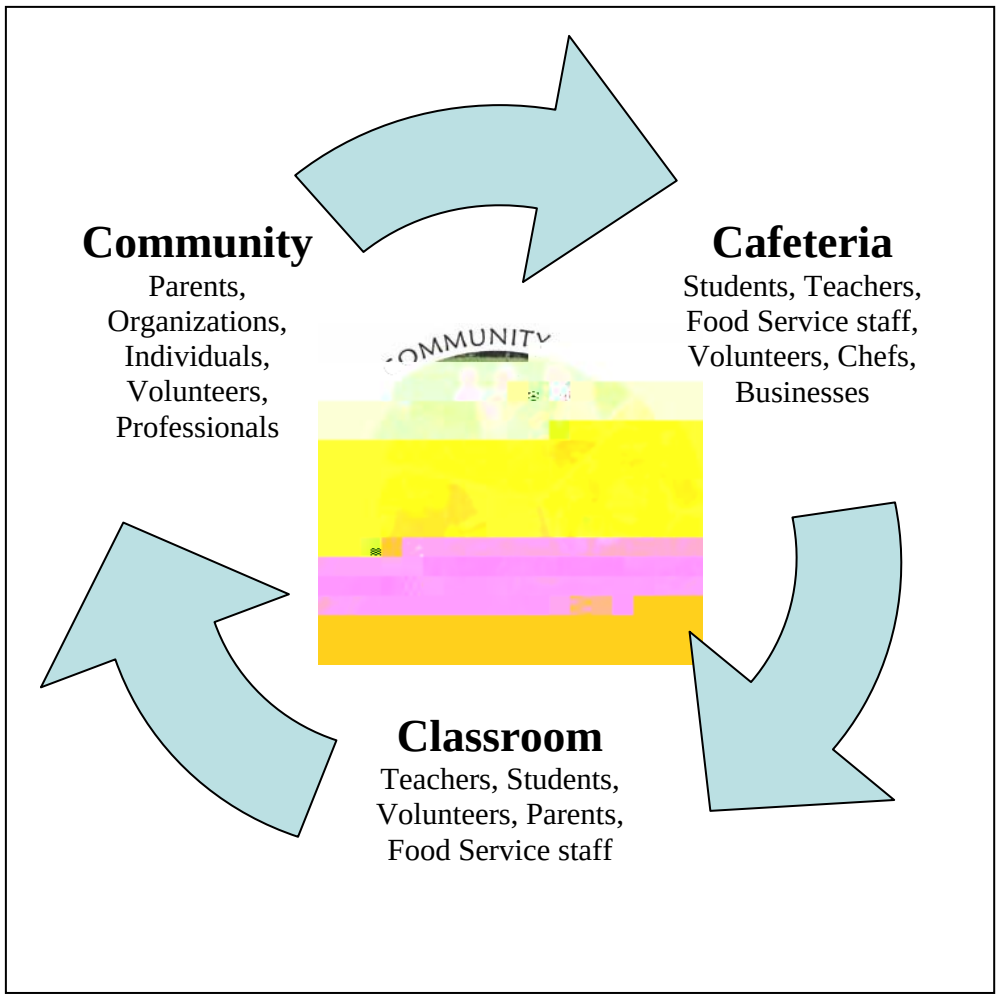
foundation for the **Burlington School Food Action Plan**

Parent and Community Member Volunteerism

Parents of school children in the BSD and community members volunteered for the BSFP in a variety of ways, such as helping with taste tests and special events and dinners, leading field trips, working in classrooms

Several suggestions were made by partners to **improve the overall partnership**.

- Strengthen and diversify the partnership through additional funds
- Ensure that all stakeholders are represented at meetings
- Improve the marketing of the project and FFN issues through branding and use of a consistent message and logo

Key components of a successful farm to school model are the "Three C's" model of community, classroom, and cafeteria that empowers and integrates all stakeholders is crucial to a successful farm-to-school model.

- *Community* should include farmers, parents, volunteers and organizations
- *Cafeteria* should include Food Service staff and directors, teachers, school administers, students, volunteers and the business community
- *Classroom* should include students, teachers, volunteers, Food Service staff, and the business community.