

## Food, Glorious Food

### December, 2011 Food for Thought

#### In This Issue

My Plate in the Classroom  
Food in the News

#### Resources

[www.myplate.gov](http://www.myplate.gov)

USDA information about the My Plate program.

[www.teamnutrition.usda.gov](http://www.teamnutrition.usda.gov)

USDA Food & Nutrition Service; information about the HealthierUS School Challenge

[www.freemyplate.com](http://www.freemyplate.com)

Free downloadable activities to encourage kids to make healthy food choices.

[www.learningzoneexpress.com](http://www.learningzoneexpress.com)

Greetings,

Food, glorious food. It is the time of year when many of us gather for special celebrations and holiday meals. We join with family and/or friends to carry on traditions that are older than our nation, or start new ones as fresh as a carrot from the ground. Old family recipes mix with concoctions from the Internet. Smells waft from kitchens that bring tears of recollection and squeals of joy. If any time of year has a focus on food as something more than fuel to sustain us, it is during this holiday season.

Food has also been in the news a lot lately. Headlines read: "Congress votes to consider pizza to be a vegetable." "Schools ban chocolate milk from the cafeteria." "Contaminated cantaloupes cause record deaths". The sound bytes frequently lead to misconceptions causing the public to react irrationally. What is the best way to counteract some of this misinformation? . . . education, of course!

In June, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) unveiled a new icon and message to help the public make healthy eating choices and become more informed about their food. The icon is called "My Plate" and it replaces the food pyramid as tool for learning about balancing our food consumption. According to Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, "My Plate is an uncomplicated symbol to help remind people to think about their food choices in order to lead healthier lifestyles."

In this issue of *Food for Thought*, we'll provide some links to the My Plate educational information and activities. We'll offer educators ways to engage students in thoughtful examinations of their food, where it comes from and what is said about it.

Thinking about our food and the impact that our choices have on farmers, the land, the economy, and our health can make preparing a meal complicated. However, I have found that it can also make procuring, preparing and eating food much more enjoyable. Food preparation gives one the time to feel grateful and connected to the people, plants, animals and planet that help to sustain us. During this holiday season I hope that you can find ways to add meaning and enjoyment to your meals and help those whom you teach or touch do

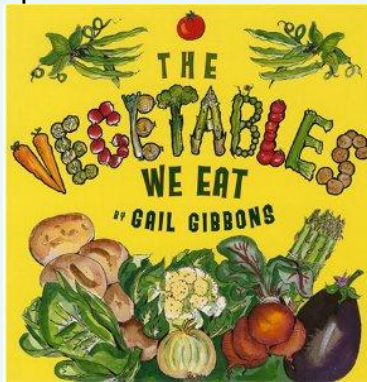
Teacher kits, PowerPoint presentations and nutritional resources for teaching about healthy food choices.

[www.nh.gov/agric](http://www.nh.gov/agric)

NH Department of Agriculture; lists of farmers markets and farm stands throughout the state.

*The Vegetables We Eat*  
by Gail Gibbons

This is a fascinating picture book that describes some of the many vegetable varieties, how they are grown, and why they are so good for us to eat. Good for ages 5 and up.



*Good Enough to Eat*  
by Lizzy Rockwell

This is a practical, hands-on tool for families who want a book that explains nutrition from carrots to cookies. Good for ages 5 and up.

the same.

Happy Holidays,

*Ruth*

Ruth Smith, Statewide Coordinator

---

## My Plate in the Classroom

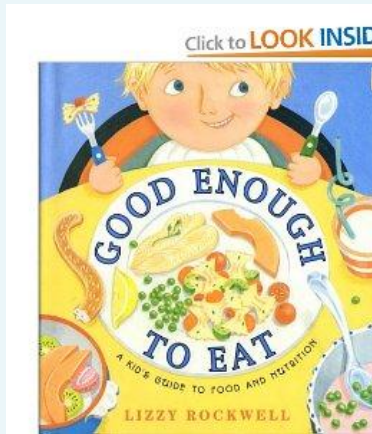
From the White House to my house (and maybe yours too) there is more talk about where our food comes from and how children and adults can make healthy choices about the food we eat. The new My Plate program put out by the US Department of Agriculture can help. It is not only designed to help individuals, but can be used by educators who are looking to enhance health lessons, compliment the Farm to School efforts of your food service, link science standards to real life experiences and help students think critically about the choices they make.

My Plate encourages consumers to be thoughtful about the foods that we eat. The guidelines state: make half of your plate fruits and vegetables, make at least half of our grains whole grains, meet your protein needs with a variety of foods, use fat-free or low fat milk, choose foods with low sodium content, reduce consumption of sugary drinks and enjoy your food, but eat less. The website provides a lot of information and resources about these guidelines including a page with "10 tips to a great plate" ([www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)).



Adding more fruits and vegetables to our diets, can be a great launching pad for discussions about how those items are raised and where they come from. The produce aisles in supermarkets can easily provide a geography lesson, especially since a law was passed in 2009 that requires most produce to be labeled with its country of origin. Send your students on a scavenger hunt to see how many different countries are represented by the fruits and veggies in their supermarket. Introducing children to the vast array of fruits and vegetables available to us can certainly increase their awareness and consumption of these foods. As part of that lesson, don't forget to look at the fruits and vegetables that are raised in New Hampshire. Some larger stores are now stocking items which they label as "locally grown/raised". It's worth investigating their sources because "local" means different things to different people.

Of course the best way to learn about the source of food is to go directly to that source by visiting a farm stand or attending a farmers market where you can meet the producers and talk to them about how they raise their products. A lot of farm stands have closed for the winter, but more and more communities are holding winter farmers markets. As the demand for local food has grown, more New Hampshire farmers are using season-extending techniques such as high tunnels and green houses to grow greens and vegetables even when the ground outside is frozen solid. Also, there are plenty of crops such as winter squashes, potatoes, onions and other root crops that if stored properly can last



## Calendar

### December 16

Ag Education Night at  
Manchester Monarchs  
Game, Manchester  
[www.monarchsjungle.com/ffa](http://www.monarchsjungle.com/ffa)

## Donate Now to NHAITC

Help to keep us  
growing in 2012.

[Click Here to Donate on  
Line](#)

or send a check to  
NHAITC at:  
295 Sheep Davis Road  
Concord, NH 03301

## Contacts

Ruth Smith, Statewide  
Coordinator  
295 Sheep Davis Road  
Concord, NH 03301  
603-224-1934  
[nhaitc@nhfarmbureau.org](mailto:nhaitc@nhfarmbureau.org)

Deb Robie, Grafton  
County Coordinator

well into the winter or even spring. So in addition to filling half a plate with fruits and veggies, maybe at least half of those could come from local farms.

Teaching children about dairy products, protein sources and grains can also provide opportunities to learn about farming. The dairy industry in our state has experienced some severe challenges over the years, but there are still 130 local farms milking cows and additional farms that raise goats for milk, and/or make cheese, yogurt and other dairy products. The Granite State Dairy Promotion ([www.nhdairypromo.org](http://www.nhdairypromo.org)) provides helpful information about the history of dairy (great to include in a fourth grade history lesson), nutritional information and activities for kids to help learn about the importance of dairy products.

Dairy and plants (beans and nuts) can provide some of our protein needs, but so can the many meat producers in our state. From beef, pork, chicken, turkey, lamb, and other more exotic sources such as red deer, buffalo and emu, New Hampshire farmers can help meet the My Plate goal of having a variety of protein sources. Though our coastline is small, New Hampshire also can provide some of its protein from locally harvested seafood. The local sources of protein are less likely to be processed or include added ingredients. Reducing consumption of processed meats is something the My Plate guidelines recommend.

The My Plate website provides educators with information and activities to help students become more aware of the role that food plays in their health. NH Agriculture in the Classroom can help make the connections between that food and the health of the land, community and people who produce it. Contact us to explore more ideas if you are interested.

## Food in the News

Food stories in the news can feed classroom curriculum the way food on our plate feeds our bodies. The number of lessons that can be gained by reading, researching and exploring the headlines is practically endless. Take for example the headline: "Pizza is a vegetable, Congress says yes". In an attempt to make it easier to meet the My Plate guidelines of reduced fats and sodium and increased vegetables and whole grains, the USDA proposed making some changes in school nutrition policies about what should be considered a vegetable. Currently as little as two tablespoons of tomato paste counts as a vegetable. That means that a slice of pepperoni pizza could meet the vegetable requirement. The purpose of the proposed legislation was to change that and also reduce the amount of French fries that are served due to their fat and salt content. Congress voted not to change the current policy which sparked a wave of headlines and sound bytes about pizza being a vegetable. To read an Associated Press article about this visit: [http://hosted2.ap.org/APDEFAULT/386c25518f464186bf7a2ac026580ce7/Article\\_2011-11-15-Congress-School%20Lunches/id-54ccdf90d4eb4752a91af50c3943bfd7](http://hosted2.ap.org/APDEFAULT/386c25518f464186bf7a2ac026580ce7/Article_2011-11-15-Congress-School%20Lunches/id-54ccdf90d4eb4752a91af50c3943bfd7)

Regardless of what side you take on this and other food related issues, engaging students (especially middle and high school aged students) in a thoughtful examination of the topic helps them develop valuable skills and learn a lot about the food they eat. First it encourages them to seek out current issue topics and dig deeper than the sound bytes. They will discover that there are things in the news that do impact their lives and are worthy of attention, such as what gets served in their cafeteria.

[wehunt4@paigecos.com](mailto:wehunt4@paigecos.com)



=



?

Secondly, they will learn that for every issue there is a variety of perspectives and before making a decision about where they stand, it is important to explore more than one view point. Food related topics can be very emotionally charged and so require some real work to get beyond the feelings to the facts. Encourage students to seek numerous sources (including primary sources) for information and not just read one report on the topic. Learning the biases of the stakeholders as well as the journalists is an essential tool in becoming informed consumers.

Finally, being able to develop an informed opinion with talking points to back up that view are skills that make for good citizens.