



Local solutions.
Planet healthy.

Case Study

The Unquowa School

Context

The Unquowa School, founded in 1917, is the oldest continuous nonprofit co-ed independent school in Fairfield County, Connecticut. It serves lunch and snacks to over 200 Pre Kindergarten through Grade 8 students, faculty and staff. The food service is self operated and manages within its own budget.

Challenge

In 2005, the new Head of School questioned the quality of the lunches regarding freshness, nutritional value, environmental waste and the beneficiaries of its purchases. She was approached by parents who asked for more whole food and less pre-packaged and processed choices. She asked the question: *"How can we improve the food we serve while maintaining fiscal responsibility?"* Then stated, *"This must be realistically replicable at other peer institutions."*

Action

Sustainable Food Systems was hired to evaluate the existing program, recommend changes for more sustainable food choices and then help implement and manage the process. In doing so the following was undertaken:

- Standard operating systems to measure weekly food, labor and indirect costs were implemented.
- Collectively established a department Vision:
 - ▶ *"To provide a nutritionally balanced, good tasting, environmentally and fiscally responsible menu that utilizes local, sustainably produced and quality ingredients."*
- New ingredients were substituted that offered simple changes which had significant impact such as organic milk, local eggs, and seasonal purchasing.
- Staff and Faculty technical training and learning journeys were facilitated that supported the reasoning for implementing a more fresh, whole and sustainable food program.
- New Seasonal recipes and menus were incorporated.



Results

The immediate results were significant savings in food costs due in large part to a more steam-lined menu that relied on controlling production through the use of food production and inventory reports, weekly operating reports and less pre-packaged and processed food. In addition the following have been incorporated:

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- Savings in food costs were reinvested into labor costs by the hiring of skilled chefs and support staff.
- Established direct purchasing and delivery relationships with local farms for beef, vegetables, maple syrup, eggs and honey.
- The creation of a Strategic Plan and Sustainable Food and Wellness Policy where written in order to instill a clear plan and direction.
- Policies include the commitment to scratch cooking with fresh and seasonal ingredients; use of whole grains; and the elimination of ingredients such as Trans fats and High Fructose Corn Syrup.
- Food and its impact have been incorporated into the classroom by inter-curricular relationships between the chefs/kitchen and faculty/subjects.
- Positive local and interstate media coverage expounding the merits and success of the program has been realized.
- Formal commitment to continuing education for food service staff as well as partnerships with agricultural, culinary and organic organizations.
- Implementation of a food composting program
- Creation of a Summer Farm Camp for children
- Development of a signature, student developed granola.
- The school food service program has been featured in the nationally renowned *Two Angry Moms* movie as a model example of success.

Reflection / Where do we go from here?

The results of The Unquowa School Sustainable Food Service are a clear indication that by going back to basics with menu, recipes and management systems, a better program does NOT have to cost more and may even save money. The school has realized its policy statement:

The Unquowa School *Farm to Fork* Policy Statement:

At The Unquowa School we strive to serve nourishing, delicious and sustainably grown food - thus empowering our students to make choices that have a positive influence on their personal health, family, community and the surrounding environment. Additionally, we want each child to learn about sustainable food choices through an integrated curriculum that links the kitchen and dining room with the classroom.