

The Burlington School FOOD PROJECT

Welcome to the Burlington School Food Project Newsletter! With farmers growing food less than a mile from downtown on the fertile Winooski River floodplain, Burlington is uniquely positioned to integrate local agricultural resources into school programs. The Burlington School Food Project (BSFP) is a 3-year collaborative effort to connect schoolchildren and their families with nearby farms by bringing more fresh local foods to cafeterias and more hands-on agriculture education to classrooms. It hopes to spark a generation of young people to become life-long consumers of nutritious foods who support local farmers that practice sustainable agriculture.

In 2002, local residents called for more Vermont-grown food in schools as a top priority during a Town Meeting convened by Burlington's Legacy Project. Access to fresh local products

can improve student health and nutrition, invest in the local economy, and benefit sustainable agriculture.

The Burlington School Food Project began in 2003 with a U.S. Department of Agriculture grant to link farm-to-school education, policy and infrastructure initiatives citywide. It is the collaborative work of the Burlington Legacy Project, Burlington School District, the Intervale Foundation, Sustainable Schools Project, the University of Vermont, and VT FEED, a partnership of Food Works, the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT), and Shelburne Farms. VT FEED has been working with schools and communities statewide for 7 years.

This newsletter includes stories of the groundbreaking efforts that spurred the BSFP, and those that have evolved since. Collectively, they are strengthening the local food system and improving the health of Burlington's children.



them in the lunch line.” Edmunds Middle and Elementary Schools took this to heart and created taste tests where students prepare healthy new foods for schoolwide sampling and rating.

Taste tests are part of the larger effort of improving school food and increasing food, farm, and nutrition education begun by VT FEED at Edmunds in the fall of 2003.

The goal is to

expose students to more fruit, vegetables, whole grains and local, seasonal products that can be featured in future cafeteria meals. Over the last two years, many new foods have been tasted and rated by more than 500 students.

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Taste Tests: Students Improving School Food Choices

Ask any parent what it's like getting children to try new foods and you'll probably get the same disgruntled answers: "It never works" or "Good luck!" But the success of the Burlington School Food Project's taste tests may give parents renewed hope that their efforts are not in vain.

Two years ago, when local interest in improving school food gained momentum, Burlington School Food Service Director, Doug Davis, shared a compelling thought. "I want to serve foods that the students will eat. Students need to try new foods first before they see

Local Teens Run "Healthy City" Farm

The Goals of Healthy City Farm:

1. To increase local food security, especially in schools and underserved populations in the Burlington area
2. To provide an alternative learning environment, skills training, and paid summer work for at-risk youth
3. To foster connections between youth, the land, and the community.

Healthy City Farm Stand
 LOCATION: in front of City Hall
 HOURS: June 20-Sept. 30
 Monday-Friday, 2:00-6:00.

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Does it seem like farmers are getting younger? If you've stopped by the Healthy City farm stand on Church Street Marketplace in Burlington the answer is, "yes!" Run by the Intervale Foundation, Healthy City is a farming-intensive summer program, that teaches Burlington

youth to grow, market, and distribute fresh vegetables. The 15-member crew, ages 13-16, is involved in most aspects of operating a small business, from ordering seeds and designing a planting schedule, to writing a business plan and managing a farm stand on Burlington's most active shopping street. New this year, the teens will also be selling vegetables to the Burlington School District to help boost the amount of local fresh foods served in the cafeterias.

During the 8-week program, the youth are paid a stipend to run the farm, located in the Intervale. They also help operate a food gleaning and distribution network with the Intervale Farms Program. The youth recover produce that would otherwise be left in the fields or composted and distribute it to social service agencies serving thousands of low-income Burlington residents.

All their efforts help to develop local food security, foster social responsibility, and build job readiness skills, while offering youth a meaningful way to con-

nect with their community and the natural environment. This project also connects teens to the working farms and farmers of the Intervale, and brings them face-to-face with underserved members of their community.

Next time you are produce shopping, stop by the Healthy City farm stand and support this important program.



"Taste Tests" continued from p. 1



Students at Edmunds Middle School serve up granola yogurt parfaits in the cafeteria

Taste Tests work like this: small groups of elementary or middle school students prepare the new food item with food service staff and later serve the food in the cafeteria. They then survey the students about acceptance of the new foods into the school lunch or breakfast menu. Most foods rate 75% acceptance or better, and several are now incorporated into the school meals program. These include berry crisp, leaf lettuce in salads

and on the sandwich bars, rice casserole, vegetable pizza, whole wheat breads, fruit salad, granola yogurt parfaits, oatmeal cookies, and spinach Caesar salad.

Seeking honest student feedback about new foods has unlimited potential for connecting to the curriculum. Preparing food involves a broad spectrum of skills and practical thinking. Sampling food promotes an open mind, and rating food enables everyone to feel that she or he is a vital participant in improving school life.

The impacts of taste tests have rippled through the school and wider community. For example, Edmunds food service staff says students' attitudes toward them are changing as they are treated

with more respect, and they enjoy having students in the kitchen helping prepare the foods. The Burlington school district is now purchasing produce from some local farms including the Healthy City Farm in the Intervale run by local teens (see article above), and Lewis Creek Farm in Starksboro. City Market has helped with fundraising efforts and provides discounts on Taste Test ingredients. Through a Department of Education Wellness Grant, taste tests were expanded to Hunt Middle School this spring. Next year taste tests will resume at Edmunds and Hunt Schools thanks to a grant from a private foundation and fundraising by City Market. Check out the school newsletters in September for future taste test dates and come join us!

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Healthy Snacking in a Global Food System

It's 10 AM in a 2nd grade classroom, and students reach into their backpacks for morning snack to refuel their bodies. An inspection of the snacks reveals cookies, crackers, cheese sticks, fruit leathers, cupcakes and colorful yogurts. The packages are quickly unwrapped and eaten, and 15 minutes later students are back at their studies. The scenario raises a few questions:

Will the snacks promote brain development? What nutrients were provided? Where did the snacks come from and who made them? How were the snacks chosen? How can we help students make healthy snacking choices?

These questions are being addressed in a 2-credit graduate course called "Healthy Snacks" offered to Burlington teachers and staff as part of the Burlington School Food Project. The course explores the local and global influences that impact children's food consumption while developing creative and fun curricular approaches to helping students understand the food system and their own eating habits. In a typical class, teachers eat and prepare healthy snacks like butternut squash butter, discuss



research on topics like childhood nutrition, and engage in hands-on activities like "plant part twister."

The disturbing national trend of youth obesity has alerted doctors and health and education officials to the state of our children's wellness. From exercise to meal patterns to snacking habits, our children make daily choices that affect their health, but their decisions aren't always as simple as apples or oranges. Many influences that shape these decisions are outside the control of children and their caregivers. To help children make healthy choices, we must consider people's access to fresh and nutritious foods, marketing messages, the state of our local farming, and many other national and global influences.

The task of ensuring a healthy, nutritious diet, however, doesn't have to be daunting. Most people love food and the chance to create delicious snacks. By cooking with, and teaching children about, local and nutritious produce, you can help children redesign their palate. Although it may take a few tries for a child to develop a taste for a new food, don't give up!



Doug Davis
Doug Davis has been a leader in the Burlington School Food Project, although he'd be the first to tell you that he was not on board at the start. As Director of the Burlington School Food Service, Doug

believes that his number one goal is to feed hungry children. For many Burlington youth, school meals can be their only meals all day. So when approached by parents who were concerned that the school food was not healthy enough, Doug was clear: he wouldn't sacrifice any student's access to the meals program. After many conversations between Doug, Vermont FEED, and interested parents, small changes began. First, Doug spearheaded an effort to buy whole grain breads for the cafeterias. "If there is one thing that schools can do, it's buy whole grains," he says. Initiatives such as taste tests and classrooms links to the cafeteria soon followed, which led to menu development and food profiling. Before too long, Burlington students were trying new foods and getting healthier lunches. Doug knew to not eliminate the popular items such as chicken nuggets and patties but instead incorporated whole grains and fresh vegetables to complement these favorites. And as Doug notes, "clearly it is working." Doug and the Burlington Schools have become a model for healthier school food initiatives and Doug was invited to speak before the U.S. Congress about his work. But the project is far from over: Doug has purchased 500 pounds of zucchini from Arethusa Farm at the Intervale for the coming school year. He hopes to convert much of it into zucchini bread!

Burlington School Food Project Testifies before U.S. Congress

On April 7, 2005, representatives of the Burlington School Food Project traveled to Washington, DC to persuade lawmakers to fund Farm-to-School programs included in the reauthorization of the Childhood Nutrition Act. The money will support one-time grants of up to \$100,000 to

community organizations launching new farm-to-school initiatives. Doug Davis, Burlington School Food Service Director, and Abbie Nelson of NOFA-VT, testified to the success of Vermont FEED's focus on the 3Cs – Community, Classroom, and Cafeteria – in improving food, farm, and nutrition educa-

tion. While some farm-to-school programs focus on only one of these aspects, such as bringing local foods into the cafeteria, Vermont FEED helps students understand the connections between all three: supporting local growers for a stronger local economy, *and* healthier school lunches!



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Lois D'Arcangelo

As a veteran teacher in the Burlington Schools for more than 30 years, Lois D'Arcangelo continues to welcome new challenges. When the Sustainable

Schools Project (SSP) began at Barnes Elementary last year, Lois worked with SSP staff to create a unit for her first graders on the cycles and seasons in the community. Through her teaching, Lois helps her students understand the connections between disciplines and between their lives and that of their community. While investigating the fall harvest, her first graders studied what plants need to survive, which plant parts people eat, and then made a healthy soup to share at a parent night. They read many books about where food comes from and wrote poems about fruit and vegetables. Lois then organized a service-learning project at the Ronald McDonald House: her first graders and their Book Buddies from Anne Tewksbury-Frye's 4th/5th grade class visited and cooked for the families staying there. Lois has been an integral part of the success of SSP at Barnes and will be greatly missed after her retirement next year.

Summer Science School for Teachers

While people imagine teachers taking the summer off to relax, many actually go back to school! This summer, like the nine before, several Burlington K-5 teachers are taking part in a unique science professional development opportunity. The Burlington Summer Science Institute and Camp offers teachers a chance to gain knowledge about science topics and refine and practice science teaching skills. With the support of the Burlington School District, Colleen Cowell and Anne Tewksbury-Frye coordinate these week-long workshops and the children's camp that follows. The Institute is based on a National Science Teachers Association model: provide teachers with training, hands-on experiences, and resources in science topics (such as wetlands, schoolyard habitats, food and nutrition), then put their new learning into practice at a consecutive week teaching camp.

Over the past three summers the Institute coordinators have worked with Shelburne Farms' Sustainable Schools Project to design and deliver this program. Each year a different topic/theme or science standard is explored. This summer teachers will investigate the "Healthy Human Body" as part of the new Burlington science curriculum. They will learn how to help their students understand human body systems, heredity, human development and how to take care of their bodies. Each teacher will develop a guided discovery lesson and literacy connections to their age appropriate unit, then test it with kids in an exciting hands-on camp.

Last year more than 70 K-5th grade children participated in the "Food, Fun and Science" camp at Champlain Elementary School. They enjoyed engaging activities, field trips, and outdoor play each day. This year we are looking forward to more of the same!

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City Market Supports Healthy School Initiative

"How can we help?" were the first words from City Market staffers, Janine, Jody, and Caroline, when they learned about the Burlington School Food Project (BSFP). City Market, on Winooski Avenue in Burlington, has been a great friend to the BSFP since the beginning. It has been an active member of the Food Council, helped raise the Burlington community's awareness of the project and has given generously of both time and resources.

Last year, City Market, in partnership with their neighbor, the Merrill-Roxy Cinema, showed

the movie *Super Size Me* to raise money for a fund to help BSFP buy ingredients for student cooking experiences in the Burlington schools. The \$1800 raised has been available to BSFP volunteers, teachers, and the Burlington School Food Service to purchase cooking supplies for school taste tastes.

Almost a year later, however, the fund was almost empty. To renew the fund and raise awareness for the project once again, City Market and BSFP teamed up to



Students prepare carrot muffins for a taste taste. City Market has helped schools purchase supplies.

bake and sell cookies. Eight volunteers and the Burlington School Food Service staff baked more than 5,000 cookies to sell at City Market June 4 and 5. City Market donated all the supplies, while staff members helped bake. The goal was to add \$2,000 to the BSFP fund.

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Gold from Garbage: Kids Create Compost

In just three years, composting in Burlington schools has grown from a pilot in Edmunds' Middle School cafeteria to a district-wide effort in almost every school. Thanks to the dedication and persistence of several teachers and community members, the district has now contracted with a hauler to pick up compost throughout the academic year at local schools.

What explains this evolution? In the fall of 2002, Edmunds Technology Education Teacher Dan Treinis decided to analyze how much food and liquid was ending up unnecessarily in the school cafeteria trash. To generate a baseline, Treinis and volunteers weighed all the waste generated at lunch for one week. The next week, they set up four different bins to separate the waste: food, liquids, recyclables, and trash. They discovered that 50% of the waste (*by weight*) was from food and napkins and 30% from liquids—all compostable items. This meant they could potentially divert up to 80% of cafeteria waste from the landfill, an exciting prospect considering the Intervale Compost Project lies only miles away! With this compelling data in hand, Treinis and volunteers, including parent Bonnie Acker, began Edmunds' composting program.

The entire school community had to be educated about com-

posting, including the custodial staff, food service, administration, and faculty. In the cafeteria, volunteers were stationed at the trash and compost bins to help everyone sort their waste. That compost was hauled to the Intervale by AllCycle, who donated its services. Despite some early resistance, composting is slowly becoming second nature. By spring 2006, the graduating eighth graders will have never known their Middle School cafeteria without composting! Edmunds Elementary School is now also composting. The younger students like using the pinchers to pick trash out of the compost bin if they make a sorting mistake!

Chittenden County Solid Waste District's educators helped spread composting across the District after hosting a meeting for other interested schools. Champlain and Barnes Elementary, Hunt Middle, and Burlington High Schools now have cafeteria composting. At Barnes, the Sustainable Schools Project inaugurated a program with compost cheerleaders who visited each classroom to teach about the importance of composting and the role that each child would play in the project. It trained 4th and 5th grade "Compost Captains" to monitor the bins in the cafeteria every day to avoid contamination.

Barnes to Offer Fresh Fruit to Students throughout 2005-2006 School Year

In order to determine how much fruit students will eat if given the choice, Barnes Elementary school has received a grant to provide unlimited access to fresh fruit during school hours. The goal is to increase fruit consumption by students, to identify the barriers

to reaching this goal and to improve students' current snacking habits, overall diet and health. The fruit will be available throughout the day in all classrooms and the cafeteria for a school in which almost all students qualify for the free and reduce-price meal program.



Bonnie Acker

Bonnie Acker is an exuberant volunteer who seems to have endless energy. Bonnie's drive to create change in the Burlington school food program began when her daughter Dia

began at Edmunds Middle School. Bonnie and her family have been volunteers at the Intervale in Burlington for 15 years eating in Bonnie's words, "the best food in the world." She saw a disconnect when she began to see what Dia was eating at school. "Healthy food should be the right and the opportunity for every child in Burlington." Bonnie believes that the changes taking place in Burlington school cafeterias have an immediate focus, that we do not have 20 or 30 years to fix the problem. As a parent volunteer spearheading the initiative to improve school lunches in Burlington, Bonnie realizes that she is up against a large challenge, but realizes that is important to be humble when tackling a project of this magnitude. Bonnie was very influential in the recent BSFP and City Market cookie initiative (see p.4). "The success of the cookie is a great way to tell a story."

School gardens underscore the value of composting as students see the Intervale compost that they helped create come back to their school to enrich the garden soils. Many teachers are also studying the compost cycle with their students.



Creating a School Food Action Plan for the Burlington School District

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The Burlington Food Council meets the first Monday of every month.

After almost two years of collaboration, research and debate, the Burlington Food Council has finalized the Burlington School Food Action Plan which promotes greater access to healthy food and increased food, farm and nutrition education throughout the local school district.

Community Food Assessment
The Action Plan is based on the earlier work of the Council, the Community Food Assessment, a comprehensive report on the state of Burlington's food system, and food, farm, and nutrition education and awareness

among Burlington's school-age children and their families.

Did you know that the Burlington School Food Services provide almost a million meals each year?

In the Assessment, the Food Council examined four major areas: 1) the farm-to-school connection; 2) food education; 3) student food experiences within schools; 4) student food experiences after school.

The Assessment features an overview of the Burlington School Food Project, as well as demographic information about the community and its agricultural resources. For example, did you know that the Burlington School Food Services provide almost a million meals each year? Or that the City of Burlington has 11 working farms on 110 acres at the Intervale, currently supplying the city with over 6% of its fresh produce?

The Council presented the Assessment at the annual Legacy Project Town meeting, and at local Neighborhood Planning Assemblies and the School Board curriculum committee. The inclusive process of writing the Assessment has sparked great community interest that has been as valuable as the document's data.

The School Food Action Plan
In early 2005, Food Council members took key findings of the Assessment and drafted objectives for the School Food Action Plan:

1. Impact food access and hunger in our community
2. Build the farm-to-cafeteria food system
3. Provide positive mealtime experiences
4. Educate the community for greater awareness
5. Empower students for lifelong learning and healthy choices
6. Integrate food, farm and nutrition education into the classroom
7. Strengthen out-of-school learning opportunities and access to healthy foods

Adoption and Implementation
The School Food Action Plan will be presented to the Burlington School Board and the City Council for adoption. With the energy, enthusiasm and sheer number of people involved in the creation of this Action Plan, it is certain to have a lasting impact. The Burlington Food Council will oversee implementing the plan over the next several years.

The Burlington Food Council

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

Since Fall 2003, the Burlington Food Council has been examining the farm-to-school food system and food, farm, and nutrition education in Burlington. They created a School Food Action Plan based on their Community Food Assessment.

The Council is open to the public and is comprised of 30 active members and more than 60 other supporters, including farmers, parents, school district employees, students, researchers, and health and nutrition experts. The City of Burlington's Legacy Project convenes the Council and provides staff support.

WHAT DOES THE FOOD COUNCIL DO?

The Council's purpose is to improve the health of children through better access to nutritious foods and food and nutrition education. An important component of this vision is to strengthen the local food system by utilizing locally produced food and connecting youth to food sources. The Council's primary goals are:

1. **Building Food Knowledge and Experience:** Youth will develop critical eating/thinking skills and gain sensory experiences in order to evaluate food choices and the food system as it relates to personal health, sustainability, and equity.
2. **Building Food Appreciation and Access:** School-age youth and their families will examine their approaches to food in school and home settings and increase awareness of the importance and value of healthy and diverse foods in their lives.
3. **Building Local Food Systems:** Stronger links will be established between local food producers and the Burlington School District to improve market opportunities for local producers, improve Food Service choices and enhance youth connection to food sources.



"The Dirt" on School Gardens

In an ongoing effort to educate students about where their food comes from, schools all over Burlington are launching school garden initiatives. These gardens will be learning labs for teaching not only food education programs but subjects such as Math, Science, English and even History as well.

Champlain Elementary School is currently the only school in the Burlington School Supervisory Union that has a community garden on its property. Established in 1982, it hosts community plots as well as areas for student projects.

Edmunds Elementary and Middle Schools received a Community Block Grant to buy startup items such as timbers for raised garden beds. Teachers, staff, and volunteers are now discussing garden ideas such as a pumpkin patch, planting trees for erosion control and a butterfly garden.

Barnes Elementary School recently received a grant from The National Gardening

Association to create a peace garden on their grounds. As part of an after-school program, six students are designing the garden, which will consist of tea-making herbs such as Bee Balm, Lemon Balm and Mint as well as blue forget-me-not flowers, all planted in the shape of the earth. The garden initiative will also be part of Champ Camp that takes place at Barnes school in the summer months.

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Barnes Elementary School students are designing a garden of tea-making herbs and blue forget-me-not flowers planted in the shape of the earth.
.....

Ira Allen Preschool received a \$1,000 Community Block Grant to design and build raised flower and vegetable beds. Although the funds will

not be available until July, there was such enthusiasm to begin sooner that the community raised money through a plant sale. The project is currently underway.

Burlington High School began their garden projects intent on beautifying their courtyards. The project then expanded when funds were reallocated from a defunct neighborhood garden project. The money covered the costs of creating



Jim Flint

Jim Flint is the Director of the Friends of the Burlington Gardens. He and his organization have been extremely influential in the development and support of school garden

initiatives in Burlington. Jim describes his support as "technical assistance." "Sometimes schools don't know where to start," he says, so he and his organization connect people with needed resources to help get projects off the ground.

The key to success, he says, is "making sure people are invested in the gardens." The biggest challenge is developing a comprehensive plan to take care of school gardens throughout the year, especially during the summer when students and teachers aren't around.

Involving summer camp and education programs helps keep watchful eyes looking after a garden and prevents it from failing. Jim also knows the importance of a garden's location: "Most of the gardens are in the front of the schools, making sure that the gardens are part of the community." The Burlington School Food Project is made stronger by the support and knowledge of Jim Flint and the Friends of Burlington Gardens.

new raised beds and restoring old ones. The raised flower beds will become vegetable gardens for the summer programs.



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Everybody Wins! Literacy-Based Mentoring Program

"Who knew that learning about sustainability could be so much fun?" This comment was made by a mentor who attended "Everybody Wins!" Vermont's parent mentor spring workshop. Everybody Wins! Vermont (EW! VT) is a literacy-based mentoring program designed to foster children's literacy and love of learning through reading experiences with caring adults.

At the workshop, adults were introduced to nine "Sustainability Bags." Each bag contains a book and an activity that Shelburne Farms generously donated to EW! VT so students and mentors could learn about sustainability together. To reinforce the work of the Burlington School Food Project, Shelburne Farms chose books relating to food, farm, and nutrition education. A

favorite is *The Milk Makers* by Gail Gibbons. This book takes readers on a journey through the process of milk production, from farm to factory. After reading the book, students use picture cards to figure out the steps needed to transform rocks to cheese. Some other favorite titles are *Weaving the Rainbow* by George Ella Lyon and *Pumpkin Circle: The Story of a Garden* by George Levenson.



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Burlington Food Council

Burlington Students & Parents,
Burlington School Board, Burlington
School District (BSD), BSD Food
Service, BSD Teachers, VT Campaign to
End Childhood Hunger, BSD PTOs,
Chittenden Emergency Food Shelf, City
Market, Burlington Parks & Recreation,
Intervale Foundation, Local Farmers,
Fletcher Allen Health Care-Nutrition,
FAHC-Vermont Children's Hospital,
Friends of Burlington Gardens, First
Congregational Church, UVM Center for
Rural Studies, UVM-CDAE, UVM Health
& Food Sciences Dept., VT Dept. of
Health and members of the Burlington
Community.

The Burlington School FOOD PROJECT

The Burlington School Food Project is
a 3-year collaborative effort to connect
schoolchildren and their families with
nearby farms by bringing more fresh local
foods to cafeterias and more hands-on
agriculture education to classrooms.

PROJECT GOALS:

- ▶ Build the capacity for Burlington to better meet the food needs of students
- ▶ Increase awareness of and encourage healthy food choices for children and their families
- ▶ Improve Burlington School District access to food from local farms

The Burlington School Food Project is made possible by funding from CSREES – USDA Community Food Projects Award # 2003-33800-14042, Alces Foundation, Vermont Housing Conservation Board, and Vermont Department of Education Wellness Grants.

Volunteer Opportunities!

BURLINGTON FOOD COUNCIL

Become a member of the Burlington Food Council. Meetings are the first Monday of each month (see p. 6).

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YOUTH-to-FARM EDUCATION

Want to help connect kids with farms? Lead occasional school field trips at the Intervale and nearby farms during the academic year. Participants receive on-site training.

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SCHOOL TASTE TESTS

Help plan and run schoolwide taste tests in Burlington (see p. 1-2).

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