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That's the Lunch Bell! Western U.P. Farm to School Feeds Local Students Tasty, Fresh Foods

October 30, 2023 - Children deserve the tastiest, freshest foods possible. The Western Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Region (WUPPDR) is excited to announce the Western U.P. Farm to School project. Over the next two years, this project will partner with the Copper Country Intermediate School District and the Gogebic-Ontonagon Intermediate School District to provide fresh, locally-grown food to the region's children.

This initiative includes professional development for teachers, the creation of a whole school readiness assessment, school garden mini-grants, community art events, planning/funding for sustainable long-term Farm to School infrastructure, and the creation of two new positions to support the institutionalization of farm to school at the local level.

"Our program gives food service directors and farmers free resources and supports the integration of local food in our schools. It also allows us the opportunity to invest in our values, which keeps money in the local economy. The benefits of farm to school aren't concentrated in just one area, they are widespread throughout the community," shared Madelina DiLisi, Farm to School Educational Consultant.

Ashley and Jake TenHarmsel of North Harvest CSA farm just one mile from Calumet-Laurium-Keweenaw Schools, where they have been producing high-quality, fresh foods for the Keweenaw area since 2013. An earlier phase of the project assisted farms like North Harvest CSA to begin sales to Houghton and Hancock schools through the 10 Cents a Meal program, a state-funded program giving a match incentive for schools to serve Michigan-grown produce to students. Ashley and Jake are excited to see more children eating fresher foods and becoming engaged in where their foods come from. *"My favorite part of Farm to School is that kids are able to access and eat fresh, healthy foods from local growers. This program will allow*

many of the children to try foods they've never had before. Connecting the kids with this program at a young age will hopefully grow their interest in gardening, healthy eating, and the local food systems community. I'm also excited to see partnerships between local schools and farms grow. From hosting teaching gardens to bringing classes out to learn on the farm, there are so many ways that this program can grow," Ashley shared.

The Western U.P. Farm to School project is funded by the Michigan Health Endowment Fund and is a collaboration among community partners, including WUPPDR, Michigan State University - Extension (MSUE), Michigan Technological University (MTU), Lake Superior Stewardship Initiative (LSSI), the Upper Peninsula Food Exchange (UPFE), Ryan. St. Community Garden, Pewabic St. Community Garden, Calumet Community Garden, local farmers, food producers, and community members like you.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact Rachael Pressley (rpressley@wuppdr.org).

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