

SOMERSET PUBLIC HEALTH FUNDING IN ACTION

Cultivating Farm to Institution

From seed to table, Madison Elementary School & Somerset County Jail make it happen!

Challenge

Data from the 2019 Somerset Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) report food insecurity in Somerset County climbing to 17%, with the state average at 12.4%. The 2021 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS) report 62% of Somerset County students report eating less than one vegetable per day. School district wellness policies have strong language for nutrition standards supporting access to locally grown food, procuring affordable locally grown food in school nutrition is often a challenge.

Approach

Students at Madison Elementary School (MES) planted squash and eggplant seeds in early Spring. They watched their seedlings grow, while learning the importance of eating healthy through both Maine Snap Educators and Boston Children's Hospital's fitkit nutrition lessons. In early June, the seedlings were transported to the Somerset Jail where inmates grew the vegetables in the 26 raised beds, with additional support from the Move More Kids Program and New Balance Foundation. Vegetables were harvested, prepared fresh and frozen, and delivered back to the school by Officers Travis Andrews and Kevin Lombard.

Somerset County Jail staff reflected on the partnership and program: *"The gardening program allows the inmates to work outside in the garden for 1.5 hours per day. The whole time they were outside, they had no stress. They were smiling and were happy the whole time they were working in the garden. The residents were shocked to realize you can be happy in jail."*

Results

Over 50lbs of frozen squash and eggplant were delivered to Madison Elementary School, which will result in locally grown vegetables going into over 2,000 meals this school year. School nutrition manager Kelly Williams has included squash and eggplant into her pizza sauce, spaghetti and pasta recipes. Future plans include: increasing the growing time by installing a 10' X 20' greenhouse at the jail, and adding a second school district to the partnership.



At A Glance

A partnership between the Somerset County Jail and school nutrition to increase access to locally grown food. Seeds were planted by students, and delivered to the jail. Inmates grew, harvested and delivered 50lbs of squash and eggplant to the school, which will result in 2,000 schools meals with locally grown vegetables. This collaboration is a true testament to community.

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<http://somersepublichealth.org>

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