

# Summer meals feature local products

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By [Starla Pointer](#) • Staff Writer • July 25, 2019

Juicy plums from Dayton are part of the lunches being served at McMinnville School District's summer meal sites this month.

The program also is serving quinoa grown near Salem, Oregon strawberries and pesto made from basil and other ingredients grown in the state. During the school year, the district also serves additional tree fruits from Stephens Farms in Dayton, kiwis from McMinnville and Oregon potatoes, corn and other local products as part of the "Farm to School" program.

"Of course they taste better, because their not trucked across the country," said Jeri Paull, catering manager with the school district and an advocate for using local products.

Paull and Cindi Hyatt Henry, the district's director of nutrition services, visited the McMinnville Farmers Market last week to look at produce and make contact with farmers. They said they hoped to find more producers who could supply enough fruits and vegetables not just in the summer, but year-round.

One of their new contacts, which may become a supplier, was a booth selling a sea plant. "Salty and delicious," Paull said.

In addition, she said, their trip to the market reinforced something she already knew: "There's such an abundance of availability right here."

Participation has increased this year in the McMinnville district's summer meals, Hyatt Henry said. Sue Buel School, Wascher Elementary, Patton Middle School and other sites show strong numbers of people 18 and younger eating the free lunches and breakfasts.

She hopes the increases are due, in part, to the push to provide local produce — not just in McMinnville, but throughout Oregon in the state departments of education and agricultures' Farm to Summer Challenge.

"We want to encourage enthusiasm for the summer feeding program," she said. "We try to provide the best, freshest things every year, but this is a notch up."

Paull noted that using local produce isn't just good for the kids.

"When you support school meals, you are supporting our local farmers," she said, encouraging families to try the summer program.

Paull said seeking out and using local produce is one of her favorite parts of the job. She loves talking to the suppliers and visiting their farms, as well as dropping by cafeterias to see students react to the fresh foods.

Each month, she arranges a focus on a particular local fruit or vegetable. In May, for instance, the "Harvest of the Month" was strawberries and rhubarb; depending on the time of year, other months might feature apples or squash.

“We’re constantly showcasing different farms and items,” Paull said.

In addition to working local produce into summer and school-year lunches, the district has a federal grant that provides fresh fruits and vegetables for snacking at two schools. Students have tried kumquats, roasted Brussels sprouts, kiwi berries and other less-common items.

They’re also getting to know dishes such as a quinoa salad and a pasta salad with pesto that Chef Caroline Hamina served this week to summer diners.

Hamina, who graduated from the Culinary Institute of New York, develops new recipes for the McMinnville district’s food program, manages kitchens and oversees the after school food program.

Another of her popular recipes is for strawberry-rhubarb Italian ice.

“It’s made entirely from fruit, and it’s good,” Hiatt Henry said.