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Heading To
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That Aren't
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WATCHING THEIR GARDEN GROW



Emily Rose of Green Mountain Farm to School helps Holland School students Dakota Pavalchak and Katie Leitch plant onion starts in the Holland School garden on Monday morning. See story on Page A5.

PHOTO BY ROBIN SMITH

Farm To School Program Gets Things Growing

BY ROBIN SMITH
Staff Writer

HOLLAND — The students knelt on the edge of the turned earth, ignoring the persistent drizzle as they drilled little holes with their fingers.

Emily Rose handed out white beans like they were precious jewels. The five students pressed beans into the damp dark soil and patted them down.

Come fall, the fruits of their labor will go on the table at lunchtime at the Holland School.

The planting Monday morning at Holland School involved all the students in a tag team that began first thing in the morning and ended at lunch with a taste test.

The school garden at Holland is one of 20 already begun or being started this week across northern Vermont by Green Mountain Farm to School.

The goal, says Rose, is to help schools grow some of the food that will be served to local students.

"All that gets harvested goes straight to the school lunch program," Rose said.

Holland school's cafeteria is still using some pumpkin puree that was harvested last year and frozen for use all year, Rose said.

And at the same time, students learn about sustainable gardening.

Rose is an AmeriCorp volunteer with Green Mountain Farm to School. Originally from Tampa, Fla., she said she shivered in the cool damp weather on Monday. But she said the garden vegetables wouldn't mind as long as the sun comes out later to warm things up.

Planting, weeding and harvesting

vegetables are the work of the after-school program in 10 of those schools with the help of Green Mountain Farm to School's four volunteers and four full-time and part-time employees.

And in 10 other schools, including Holland, Green Mountain Farm to School offers a comprehensive program of in-class workshops, field trips to farms and even taste tests.

On Monday, Holland students got to cut up and sauté asparagus from a local farm in Lowell.

The school garden actually began months ago. Students helped start some plants indoors and designed the look of the garden on paper.

The plants grew indoors at the Holland School under special lights until Monday, when teams of students led by Rose and Andy Testo of Green Mountain Farm to School took the young plants out and put them and seeds in the garden on the edge of the school lawn.

Rose spent a few minutes with each group, explaining how to keep busy feet out of the garden soil and on the paths that students had made by stamping their feet around.

Students each had a chance to put in seeds and plants. The youngest did beans and sunflower seeds and onions.

The third and fourth grade students planted the "three sisters" — corn, beans and squash.

Others put in tomatoes and basil, and still others potatoes and marigolds.

The groupings are important, Rose said.

Beans climb the corn while putting nitrogen in the soil that the corn

needs. Squash cover the ground to block out weeds, she said.

Marigolds keep the potato beetles away. And basil keeps bugs away from tomatoes, Rose said.

For fun, they not only planted orange carrots but purple ones too. And the students learned about plant "parts" along the way — bell peppers are the fruits, broccoli are stems and flowers, and carrots are roots, Rose said.

Over the summer, school volunteers will keep the gardens weed free with help from members of Green Mountain Farm to School. And in the fall, the students will harvest their vegetables for their cafeteria and get to sample more of what they grew.

The Green Mountain Farm to School program is a non-profit that is funded through:

- Grants;
- Private donations;
- Through the schools that offer the expanded program.

The organization's first school garden was at Jay-Westfield School about five years ago.

Now, there are school gardens across Orleans County. Along with Jay-Westfield and Holland, they are in Albany, Brownington, Coventry, Irasburg, Glover, Lowell, Orleans and Troy.

By noon on Monday, the Holland garden was all in. A group of youngsters led by Testo had even planted a circle of sunflowers in the center of the garden.

Come fall, the youngsters will be able to hide in the center of the garden circle and eat the seeds while they harvest their own food.

Whitefield Man Indicted