

School garden program continues to grow

NEWPORT — Students at 15 area schools received a great surprise last week as they returned from summer vacation. With the help of students and volunteers, areas that were once lawn and barren soil had been transformed into lush and bountiful school gardens full of colorful flowers, climbing vines and towering sunflowers.

2009 marks the fourth year that Newport based GMFTS has been working to build a more local, sustainable food system by celebrating and sharing the agricultural traditions of the Northeast Kingdom with area school children. Following the success of the original garden site at Jay/Westfield in 2005, school gardens at Coventry, Holland, Lowell, and Troy were up and growing by 2007. This year the GMFTS program, Sprouts has expanded to 10 new schools including: Albany, Barton, Brownington, Cambridge, Glover, Hyde Park, Irasburg, North Country Junior High School, Orleans, and Waterville, bringing the total number of partnering schools to 15. At these 15 schools the students are able to contribute to their own health as well as the health of their peers by growing, preparing and serving food in their school's cafeteria, and engaging in fun and educational activities focusing on healthy food choices and the importance of agriculture in their community.

The garden is an exciting part of the year-round after-school Sprouts program that takes a hands-on approach to learning. Starting this fall students will take part in weekly workshops that focus on farming and nutrition. The Sprouts program participants will be busy with a wide range of activities such as preserving foods from the garden, saving seeds for next year's garden, and even making pretzels using wheat

that students themselves helped to grow, harvest, grind and bake. Now that's satisfaction you can taste.

In spite of the cool, wet summer the school gardens have already produced over 175 lbs of food, with the bulk of the harvest still to come. One school in particular has embraced its new garden as a tool for learning and service. This spring marked the ground breaking of the first vegetable garden at Glover Community School. The students who participated in the Sprouts after school program were able to plan, design, and plant the unique garden, which includes several types of tomatoes, popping corn and flour corn, mini-white cucumbers, a wheat patch, a variety of herbs and flowers, and many other delicious fruits and vegetables. And with the help of the summer garden program volunteers, the Glowing Garden of Glover now has a beautifully painted sign gracing its border. In addition to creating the new garden sign, the summer program volunteers were instrumental in helping to maintain the garden during summer vacation by weeding, harvesting, and helping with general upkeep. Much of the food harvested during the summer was donated to the kitchen at the Union House Nursing Home in Glover. With school back in session, the remaining food will be harvested and prepared with the help of students and served in the school cafeteria. Part of the excitement of the new garden is that students get to taste the difference in freshness and flavor of a carrot straight from the earth and a tomato ripe off the vine. Students will also learn ways to eat healthy all year

long by preserving the harvest just as their grandparents might have done.

For more information about Green Mountain Farm-to-School and its Sprouts Program visit: www.greenmountainfarmtoschool.org

About Green Mountain Farm to School

Green Mountain Farm-to-School' is a nonprofit organization in Newport, VT founded in March of 2008, whose mission is to restore and strengthen local food systems in Vermont by promoting positive economic and educational relationships between schools, farms, and communities. GMFTS' vision is to build local food systems in Vermont that promote environmental stewardship, create sustainable local economies, and nurture the health and wellbeing of our children and our communities. GMFTS currently serves fifteen school communities in the Northeast Kingdom with plans to expand statewide.