

Bill to bring local food into school cafeterias

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Vibrant, fresh, green vegetables and organic, grass-fed beef, both grown within miles of Lopez school; that's what students, teachers, farmers and even many government officials are envisioning.

The "Farm to Cafeteria" Act of 2003, which is known as S.1755 in the U.S. Senate, looks to erase many of the challenges public schools face when attempting to purchase locally-grown food. A similar bill has passed through committee in the House of Representatives. If approved by Congress and signed by the President, it will provide grants of up to \$100,000 for farm to cafeteria projects.

The Lopez school recently invited Congressman Rick Larsen, Senator Maria Cantwell and Senator Patty Murray to tour a "Farm to Cafeteria" pilot program with S&S Homestead Farm, and lobby for funding so this can become a permanent arrangement available to all schools. The school is also working with S & S Home-

stead and the Washington State University Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources to develop a program which educates students about the importance of local food production and their health.

Congressman Larsen sent one of his aides, Cherie Little, after receiving the invitation. Little, who arrived on Wednesday, March 10, began her day with lunch in the school cafeteria. There, students told her of the projects they were completing in conjunction with the "Farm to Cafeteria" program. Next, Little toured S & S Homestead Farm, where Henning Sehmsdorf explained many of the educational opportunities he offers the students.

"It was wonderful to see a concept put into action," Little said of the work Sehmsdorf, his wife Elizabeth Simpson, and the rest of the Lopez school staff and students are doing. She said. "Now it's up to us to acknowledge it and make it useable."

SEE FOOD, PAGE A2

FOOD

CONTINUED FROM A1

LOPEZ STUDENTS WANT LOCALLY-GROWN ORGANIC FOODS IN THEIR CAFETERIA

As it stands now, price, not quality, dictates where and what kind of food is purchased for school lunch and breakfast programs. "The cafeteria at Lopez Island School, like most cafeterias all over the country, uses food supplied by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and by commodity suppliers that are subsidized by the federal government. The reason for this is that school budgets do not allow enough money to purchase higher quality, locally and ecologically grown food," Lopez High School junior Tasha Wilson wrote in her Ecological Food Production: Farm to School Project essay. Wilson is one of several Lopez students who are involved with the Agriculture Science flex class which works with Sehmsdorf and Simpson's farm and the S & S Center for Sustainable Agriculture (SSCSA), the educational arm of the farm). Sehmsdorf and Simpson operate an entirely organic and sustainable farm.

Those involved in the high school's Agricultural Science class take their health very seriously, as do many of their peers. Several students decided to take things into their own hands by undertaking projects that brought locally grown, organic food to the cafeteria. Seniors Josh Marshak, Amy Shipman and Alena Marshak undertook a fundraising project that eventually supplied Lopez Island grass-fed beef. Wilson, Marshak, Poppy Dalton, and Jon Holland grew 50 different varieties of lettuce and Asian greens at S & S Homestead; the vegetables eventually ended up on their peers' cafeteria trays.

The students were generously helped by S & S Homestead Farm, which donated land, funds and time to the project.

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